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JOHN LEXLEY'S TROUBLES.

VOL. I.

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CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY, W.

JOHN LEXLEY'S TROUBLES.

BY

CHARLES W. BARDSLEY, M.A.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:
CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY.
1877.

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"We will add this in general, touching the affection of envy, that of all other affections it is the most importune and continual; for of other affections there is occasion given but now and then; and therefore it was well said, 'Invidia festos dies non agit:' for it is ever working upon some or other."—BACON, *Of Envy*.

To

FANNY AND BESSIE HIGGINS.

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JOHN LEXLEY'S TROUBLES.

CHAPTER I.

"Good Hubert, Hubert, Hubert, throw thine eye
On yon young boy: I'll tell thee what, my friend,
He is a very serpent in my way;
And wheresoe'er this foot of mine doth tread,
He lies before me——"

King John.

THERE was only one inn at Lackington in those days, the Unicorn. Naturally, therefore, the coach stopped there. Evidently the "High-flyer" was accustomed to a cordial reception by the landlord. Had he been a duke, and the hostelry a castle, the greeting could not have been more ostentatious. A small retinue of stable-men lined either side of the big porch, over which the fabulous animal that gave title to the house was painted in brilliant pigments. There were two maids in the rear of the front passage—neat of hair, clean-handed, and saucy. The landlord stood at the door, portly and important.

By his side was planted the rubicund landlady; and by her side, or rather looking over her left shoulder, their sole offspring, a daughter about eighteen, and pretty. She had light blue, mischievous eyes, and permanent dimples in both cheeks and chin. Twenty years hence she would be the fac-simile of her mother, for already she was chubby and fat.

"Sharp, Ben, with them buckets!" The coach was issuing from the big chestnut that leaned over the garth-fence, and touched the roof of the smithy on the other side of the road.

For fifteen years, at least, the landlord had said "Sharp, Ben, with them buckets!" exactly as the "High-flyer" had passed this little avenue. For fifteen years Ben could remember that he and the buckets had been there, and "ready, ay, ready."

It was a bright, wholesome afternoon, somewhat late in the autumn, but the sun was all aglow upon the panes of the scullery, and the chestnut seemed on fire. A mere ripple of cool air, as it curled the leaves, appeared but to be fanning the golden flame. The hillside, too, behind, had a deep purple hue. It was a nice day to be travelling on the old coach-road; it was a pleasant spot to be put down at.

The travellers evidently thought so, for they got down smartly, and did not shake themselves as if they had been chilled, nor stretch their limbs as if

they had been cramped, nor utter a grumble as if they had been cross. Only one passenger seemed moody but it was not the moodiness of sulky complaintiveness—rather of mental absence. He appeared to have forgotten that his journey was over, for he sate upon the back seat till every one had descended but himself.

"Good-day to you, Mr. Lexley. You're waiting for the ladder? Bob!"

But the buxom landlady was before him.

"Hand him down to me, Master Lexley. Poor deary! Bob 'ud wakken him."

"Thank you. If you can manage to take him without rousing him I shall be glad. He's very tired, and only fell asleep about an hour ago."

"Ay, it's a long journey for a young child. Eh, but he's a bonny lad!"

The lift down was not successful. There was a slight lurch of the coach, for Ben and two handy youths were lowering a heavy box on the other side. The child awoke, opened his grey, sensitive eyes, and started in great fright at good Mrs. Brown's round cap, and rounder face. It could only be the size that scared him, for motherliness was written in every line of the latter. He did not scream, but there was a suppressed cry, that was more a sob than a cry.

It will be seen that Mrs. Brown and her husband

knew the passenger. Well they might, for he and his father, and forefathers *ad infinitum*—well, say for a comfortable six hundred years—had had their dwelling in Lackington village, now developing into a thriving and pert town. The Grewbys of the Park, and the Lexleys of the Grange, every one knew.

Nevertheless, not merely the landlady, but Clotty —short for Clotilda—and the maids all looked at Ralph Lexley with more than customary heed this glorious afternoon in autumn. Evidently, he was worthy of something more than ordinary attention to-day. Even the horses turned their heads in his direction, and did not seem to mind the splintered scintillations of hot red light that frisked about the forge across the way.

"So he's coom'd at last, Master Lexley. That's wi' getting married," said Mrs. Brown. She had given him up to his father. There he clung tenaciously.

Mr. Lexley seemed confused. "And why not?" he replied somewhat sharply.

"Nay, I've nought agen it. I was thinking as, maybe, old Mr. Lexley, as is gone, would ha' liked to ha' clapped eyes on him. But that's no business o' mine." Mrs. Brown could be testy. Ask the maids about that!

The gentleman looked as if he stood at bay. "It wasn't convenient," he said, after a pause, during which there were one or two convulsive twitches at his lips.

"O' course not, or you'd ha' fetched him afore, that's for sartin." The landlady had forgiven him. Somehow, he looked sad and woebegone.

"What's the young gentleman's name?" asked Clotty. How women know the sex of babies and small children I can never make out.

"Johnnie—John, that is—John Lexley," returned the father.

"Ay, ay, after his grandfather. Eh, but he'd ha' made a fuss o'er him. Won't you take something, Master Lexley? He's none so light for the distance you've to go."

"Nothing, Mrs. Brown, thank you. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir. Eh, but I never seed such a scared-looking child afore, I never did!" she added, as father and son disappeared round the corner of the stable.

"What beautiful eyes he had," cried Clotty; "so large—and—and pensive." Clotty had just been reading a novel from a new circulating library.

Meanwhile the little boy was borne of his father along the road that led by the churchyard, and had entered into the High Street—the one only street

that Lackington could have boasted not more than twenty years back. It was curious to note the tenderness with which Ralph Lexley carried his burden. There was barely a chill in the slight wind that blew in their faces from the west, but to screen Johnnie he had him well-nigh enveloped head and all in the ample folds of a dark travelling rug, the child's face resting high upon his right shoulder against his cheek.

It seemed as if he did not care that any one should see into that precious parcel.

He did not stop to talk with anybody. He did not appear to notice the nods or even spoken greetings of those of his acquaintance who passed or overtook him. There was a peculiar secretiveness in his look. He would seem to watch almost cunningly the pedestrian in the distance, and yet, when he drew nigh, to have lost all consciousness of his existence. Afar off everybody in the street seemed to be the object of sharp and surreptitious observation ; but as they bore down upon him his look became altogether abstracted. But ever and anon he would press the little one close to his heart, and refold the ample covering about his delicate and fragile limbs.

Only once the boy spoke. He had suddenly lifted his head.

"Why does the sun set, papa?"

"That little boys may shut their eyes and go to sleep," replied his father, cheerily.

"I don't like the dark." He shivered. Mr. Lexley tightened his grasp.

"Why don't you like the dark, Johnnie?"

"It's so black, and yet——"

"Yet what?"

"I don't know." The lad clutched his father's neck convulsively. "Papa, I can see so much more distinctly in the dark, and it frightens me—not chairs and chimneypieces, but strange, oh, such strange things—things I never see in the daylight. What can it be?"

"Imagination—a very vivid one, too, I should say," said his father. "I was very easily terrified when I was your age."

"And are you never frightened now?"

"No,—I think not," replied the other musingly.

"But didn't that man frighten you?"

"What man?" Mr. Lexley started.

"In the long cloak, going into that big building. Oh, he had such a strange look! I thought you trembled. I did. I hope I shan't see him again."

"That was your uncle, Johnnie—your new uncle. I hadn't time to stop him, and he was on the other side of the road. You will learn to love him dearly, I trust. I dare say he will be very kind to you."

Somehow, Mr. Lexley did not utter the words very hopefully.

"What was that building he went into?"

"Zion Chapel. He's a deacon."

The child lay back; the father covered his head again. No more words were spoken. By-and-by the darkness crept upon them; but they had not far to go now to reach their destination. They passed by a large mill. You might see it was perfectly new, even in the sombre twilight that was fast deepening into gloom. Then a gate stopped them, with two high stone pillars, one at either side, and a great round ball of stone at the top of each, very white and ghostly; but Johnnie did not see them. This passed, they entered a kind of orchard or garth. Fruit trees were dotted here and there—very fantastic they looked in the faded day. Two or three lights twinkled down upon them in front.

"We're at home, lad."

Waiting at the door—an old-fashioned door it was, above a large flight of shallow steps—stood Johnnie's new mother.

What a delicate, frail child he looked as Jane Lexley took him out of his father's arms.

"You kept him warm, Ralph?"

"Yes, it was a warm day."

Johnny fastened his eye upon Jane. Perhaps

the light fell badly, for he hung back, and clung to his father's hand.

"Papa, take me back."

"This is your new mamma; she will be very kind to you. Won't you go to her?"

Again the little boy, fast holding the hand that had borne him so far, looked earnestly into Jane Lexley's face. She had changed her attitude, or the light fell with brighter illumination. Something in her face seemed to reassure him. He allowed her to lift him up, and she forthwith bore him into a room where was an old-fashioned fireplace, with a bright fire, coal at the foundation and a log above, crackling forth welcome. A large candelabra shed a softened, and yet warm, glow upon the thick carpet, and well-filled book-case, and crimson curtains. An urn was hissing on the table. The said table was not overloaded, but there were one or two substantial realities there, nevertheless; and a hot muffin and a "backstone cake," as it was called in those parts, were toasting themselves beside the andiron.

"I'm hungry," said Johnnie, after a prolonged stare at a piece of brawn. Jane was chafing his legs by the fire.

"And so you ought to be, darling," said his stepmother with another kiss.

"I like you," replied Johnnie—"at least, I think

so." This was after a pause. He had been looking at the fire-dogs; he had never seen one before.

Jane seemed pleased. So especially did her husband. His nervousness was gone. He divested himself of his overcoat, made one or two changes in his dress, put on his slippers, and sat down. He smiled contentedly on stepmother and child. If the reader could have read that smile, he would have interpreted thus: "She will be good to Rachel's child." From what I, the author, know of Jane Lexley, I believe so, too.

It was a comfortable sight to watch her just now. Only three months a bride, she had wrought wondrous changes in that old-fashioned abode. Not the changes that hurt the eye of association. The alterations effected by her had offended no habituations of her husband's mind, nor stopped the gap of memory. She had unmade nothing; only she had given warmth to a house over which had been insensibly creeping the chilliness of age, and the desolation of decay.

Hers was an interesting face. There was an instant attraction. A single fillet bound her dark hair. The transitions of her glance were rare; her meek eye looked upon each object in turn, animate or inanimate, with a lustrous, steady gaze. Her small face was clearly oval, her head being poised exquisitely upon a rather long neck. There was no disquiet

about her—every posture was soothing. Precision and meekness of an almost Quaker-like character marked her dress; its simplicity was something more than Puritanic, it was religious. A woman of such steadfast truth she looked, that trial should scarce be able to shape means to test it, none to overbear it; a woman to admire, and then reverence, and by-and-by, if affection be the complement of both, to love.

And yet there was a something lacking. What was it? Either Nature had halted, or the shadow of past experience had overcast her face. It was like a fair landscape with a haze upon it, which you felt must disappear before your eye could feel contented. A single ray, a sparkle of natural humour in her glance, would have made up the deficiency. A suspicion of mirth in the corner of her lips would have done all that was wanted. But neither was forthcoming, and the countenance was one of repose rather than charm.

The Lackington folk thought that, upon the whole, Ralph Lexley had married judiciously—they did not say well. No doubt they all acknowledged that his union with Ebenezer Emlott's sister had brought him down at least one or two rungs of the social ladder.

CHAPTER II.

"Here, ... the town is extending in a surprising manner. Abundance, not of new houses only, but of new streets of houses, are added, as also a new church . . . . so that the town is almost double to what it was some years ago."—DEFOE (*Tour*).

THERE are still men and women who can recollect, and are willing to recollect aloud for the visitor's benefit, Lackington as an old-fashioned village with one long straggling street—the High Street, of course, although there was no other street, strictly so called, from which it might be distinguished. There were lanes lying low, and pathways of a medium elevation, but there was only one street. This street was distinguished by dwellings set corner-wise, and gables that abutted upon the very middle of the road, and it terminated as a street pure and simple at the church, which edifice lay nestling lone and apart in a deep hollow, surrounded on three sides by a stream, on the fourth by a cowslip meadow, which stretched away and lost itself amid other cowslip meadows beyond.

The road here was flanked by a low stone parapet—grey stone. Everything was of stone, bricks being far too expensive. And as you leant upon it you gazed downwards, well-nigh sheerly some thirty feet or so. At the foot of this sharp descent the Scudd, the stream aforesaid, brawled if the weather was stormy—stagnated if it was not; and across it lay the churchyard, with many a crumbling headstone, and yew-trees that were said to be pre-historic in origin.

At the beginning of the present century Lackington was still a quaint, pretty, sleepy place, with a fulling-mill and a flour-mill, one worked by water, the other by the wind—a place where every old-fashioned custom was kept up, especially such festivals as the wakes, the rush-bearing, and the church-ale. It was by these feasts the local calendar was carefully regulated. On these occasions the town woke up indeed. The country folk around poured in, and, what with jollity and good fellowship, the Unicorn had a fine time of it. Then for an interval Lackington went to sleep again. At the epoch of which I am speaking the sexton and the clerk were great people, and so seasoned had they become with good-healths at weddings, and lamb-drinkings, and christenings, and, above all, the overflowing hospitalities of the funeral-feast, that they could drink more without getting drunk than any other per-

sonages of like importance for half a dozen miles round. Their sobriety was proverbial. At the beginning of the present century Lackington was so small that everybody knew everybody else. I dwell on these facts. They are so wonderful when one looks upon Lackington as it is in the year of grace eighteen hundred and seventy-seven, with its——but this belongs to another paragraph.

A little more than a generation later a great change had come, or was coming, over the place. The High Street was still a shuffling, shambling affair. It still took you fifteen minutes to go to church, when you could have gone in three had you been allowed to walk in a direct course. Thus the town as of yore—that part of it, I mean, that went to church—got to morning prayers late, for it timed the journey by the crows' route, and walked it by that which its forefathers had imposed upon it. But Lackington was waking up, nevertheless. There were factories and chimneys, and rows of houses—still grey-stone—and narrow streets running at right-angles from the main thoroughfare; and pumps and alleys, and shops and public-houses, and a "Lion" to fight the "Unicorn" for customers; and the clerk was less respected; and a Baptist chapel four-square stood at the corner of Elder Lane. The body who worshipped there used, years gone by, to meet in a semi-surreptitious manner

in a cobbler's workshop—the cobbler, with lungs like his own leather, being the minister; but they had paid their tithes without more than formal complaint, and were evidently not inimical to the Establishment, for they kept such festivals as Pancake Tuesday and Veal-pie Sunday with careful particularity, waiting decorously for the church-ale, and Whitsun-ale, and clerk-ale, and bride-ale, and, indeed, all the ales, to wash down these more material and substantial feasts. But over this wholesome state of things a change had come. In the chapel lay the proof.

Other changes came as time went on. Lackington became incorporated. The town was very proud of itself. The town—I beg its pardon—the Town had quadrupled its population within thirty years. That great staple manufacture which had made the county of Brockborough so famous throughout the world, although it had concentrated itself more particularly in the south-eastern district, had also made its influence felt as far as Lackington. Lackington now covered acres where it formerly had been content with square rods; but the square rods had had little patches of flowers and green—the acres had none. It was shocking that Lackington, being such as we have stated, should be without a member of parliament, without a mayor, or an alderman, or even a paltry common-council-man. At this moment the town's-

people have all these treasures. The mayor's chain of office, manufactured at Birmingham, of steel overlaid with gold, is one of the most massive things of its kind in the kingdom—but very heavy. Two mayors, one still living, had a stoop in the back years after their retirement from office; and one thin and delicate gentleman, whose wife and daughters had bought new dresses on his appointment, had to resign active office the Monday after attending Divine Service at the parish church. He had staggered beneath his burden from the outer gate, over the churchyard, through the porch, up the aisle; but everybody thought it was the dignity, not the chain, till it was found he could not stand up when "the wicked man" was read. He was there and then carried out of church, and out of office, so to say. Neither his wife nor his daughters looked up afterwards, and as to himself, with a chronic crick in his neck and spine, that was out of the question.

But these are Lackington's halcyon days. Scarcely more than seventy years ago there were but two families who were in any degree closely connected with the prosperity of the town—the Grewbys and the Lexleys. Between them they owned all the land whereon the village stood. Nevertheless, the Grewbys were the more consequential of the two. It was Grewby Park that was the great attraction to oc-

casional visitors, with its splendid avenue fully half a mile in length, with its magnificent oaks and elms, with its stream—again the scudd—skirting the low-lying woods, and with its large and picturesquely-situated house in the rear. Fully two-thirds of Lackington lay on their land, and the natural position of the place was such that if any development should occur, that development would be of necessity upon Grewby property. The Lexleys had an estate compact, and far from inconsiderable in size, but only one corner trenched upon the borders of the town, and this was the least eligible for building purposes. The Grewbys it was, therefore, who flourished under the new era of industrial development.

Not that the Lexleys were no better for the change. But they lost a certain amount of caste in the affair. The Grewbys were still the Grewbys. They never soiled their hands with business. Passively, through the land steward, they allowed street after street of cottages to be built, which, while they brought in a considerable revenue, were out of the line of observation from the front windows of the House, and away, too, from that broad reach of park-land, on whose borders they nevertheless trenched. The Grange, as it was called, where the Lexleys lived, was situated much nearer to the town; and through this and another circumstance to be mentioned

they became embrued with commerce. Any claim they might have had to a more than local position they lost thereby.

That other circumstance was this—the Lexleys had built a mill. From the day that that structure was set up, the distance between the two families was distinctly widened. There was still a formal interchange of civilities. Once in every six months, or perhaps less, the heavy coach of the Grewbys was to be seen at the Grange. The conversation that followed dragged even more heavily than the coach. Cold but polished hauteur on the one side was faced with a dogged "don't-care-what-you-may-think-of-us" kind of manner on the other. Then they parted, and never met again till the next time, which sentence, however absurd in appearance, after all expresses the formal character of these interchanged civilities. From the very first the Lexley mill throve. A good managing partner had been introduced, shrewd of knowledge, determinate of action, and in process of time, Ralph Lexley the younger (in what respect or relationship he was the younger we shall state by-and-by) had learnt to copy the more skilled qualities of his co-worker, and bade fair to make a practical business man. Not that any large fortune had so far accrued to the Lexleys, but the result proved, from a monetary point of view at least, the wisdom of the

scheme. It is just possible that this coolness might have abated in course of time. Success is the best of excuses. It could not be forgotten all at once that the two families had flourished together for centuries. The traditions of Grewby Park and Lexley Grange ran pretty considerably the one into the other. The parish register proved past marriages betwixt the two, so that something more than hollow courtesies and bare affectations of friendship had been interchanged. The parish church still contained its two family pews, one on either side the chancel, and to the outward eye both had been constructed for tenants who were on a par, socially speaking. Neither bore trace of ancient superiority. The escutcheon of the Grewbys was bigger, and had been renewed twice. The Lexleys' looked old, yellow, and begrimed; but that was the only difference. With these traditions of former union, it is just possible, I say, that the Grewby-Lexley connection might have been renewed, especially as the mill was prosperous; but the mill was not the only subject that had caused a soreness.

The Lexleys had crotchets on the matter of religion.

It was a curious thing, nevertheless quite true, that the Lexleys had ever had a leaning to the side of Dissent. A strong tide of Puritanic blood flowed in their veins. The only Lexley who could be said to

have figured in history was a stern and uncompromising Puritan. He it was, Ralph Lexley, who, tradition said, had been locked up in the cellar by his father, that he might not join, at the age of fourteen, the newly-modelled army of Cromwell, after Essex had been thanked for his failures, and shelved. He it was whose letters, still preserved, declared his character; one who, without a tinge of conscious hypocrisy, interlarded his daily speech with quaint texts, and transacted all his business through the medium of the Scriptures. He it was who thought, and thought it with all sincerity, that the truly godly never smiled; that flowing hair was libertinism; and that the nose was the only outlet for converse on comfortable doctrines, after the nature of man had been truly renewed. I say again, there was no conscious hypocrisy in this Lexley. In him breathed that austere sanctimony that was the offset to the vicious spirit of his age, just as the debauchery of the Restoration was the reaction from the gloomy and hypocritical saintliness of the Commonwealth—for hypocrites there were in plenty, if Lexley was not one. When this latter time arrived, Ralph set forth with his wife and children, Abdias, Sara, and Ichabod (this last was born immediately upon the landing of Charles), and at Bristol embarked for the Western Continent. There his other children, Barnabas, Ab-

stinence, Experience, and Elnathan, were born. There his life passed for over twenty years in a fashion that seemed to harmonize with the primitive histories contained in the only Book he ever read. Secretly he delighted to find an affinity established betwixt himself and the patriarchs of the Old Testament. Each day saw him settled down with but increased satisfaction in the rôle he had ordained for himself.

But a change came. Dr. Increase Mather, having been deputed in 1685 to go and thank King James for his Toleration Act, persuaded his friend Ralph Lexley to join company with him. At Plymouth a message awaited the exile that both his brothers were dead, and that Lexley Grange befell him of right.

At first the news—apart from the loss of his brothers—brought him no satisfaction. It broke in upon his peace. He liked his exileship. The self-abnegation of it was comfortable. He liked to think he had been driven forth as Lot from Sodom. He was almost surprised, on landing, to find no traces as yet of the bituminous waves which were to overwhelm the cities of England's goodly plains. And now one of the snuggest little properties imaginable, in dangerous contiguity to the same, fell to him. It was a messenger of Satan to buffet him. He would refuse it.

But when he saw the old place again, he changed his mind. Here he could set up a banner. Around him dwelt not merely the gay and the godless, but the leaders of Babylon, the Papal gentry. He sent for his children, and if by contrast he could have affected his neighbours for good, he ought to have accomplished a work indeed. He died—in what state of spiritual comfort I do not know—and Abdias reigned in his stead. In the matter of ceremonial, as also in his uncompromising hatred of the Papists, Abdias had the true spirit of his father, and through him it descended to other generations. For while time had toned down the more active intolerances of the Lexleys, and while they themselves had taken less and less to drab and sad-looking garments, there was still as ever that dread of the Romish Church, and its influence on the English Church and nation at large, that caused many an awkwardness to the company when they met at such neutral trysting-places as the hunt, or the market-place, or the assembly. On the whole, the Lexleys were avoided; and this it was helped them also to that lower rung of the social ladder on which our story finds them.

CHAPTER III.

"Scarce two gentlemen dwell together in the country, but there is emulation betwixt them and their servants, some quarrel or some grudge betwixt their wives or children, some contention about wealth, gentry, precedency."—DEMOCRITUS JUNIOR.

IT happened that at this time the Lexleys had a feeling against the Grewbys also. If the building of the mill had offended the Grewbys, the conduct of the Grewbys had shocked the Lexleys. We have referred to the mill; let us notice this other scandal. The family at the Park had but recently appointed to the Lackington vicarage a man who was exactly of the class which would be most repellant to the cherished conviction of the Grange people. They could not object, of course, to his being a gentleman, genial and kind, nor yet to his being handsome, and courtly in his bearing. But Mr. Bradford was rather more suave than saintly. He was a better judge of wine than doctrine, and could discourse more eloquently over the table than from the pulpit. He

was a stiff Churchman, but more by extraction than conviction. He had a dislike of Popery on English and political grounds, but had taken wine with a Catholic squire within a fortnight of his arrival at the vicarage. As a good patriot he abhorred the Romish system, of course he did, as much as any man; but the apostle had bid him be courteous without any reservation of creed or class, and he stuck by this piece of advice to the exclusion of a good many other pieces of advice given by that same apostle—so at least the Lexleys thought.

But there was the more closely religious aspect of the question; and here Mr. Bradford had no difficulty at all. He acted by one simple rule with a determination that, in a better cause, would have gained him golden opinions. He never touched upon dogmatic differences, directly or indirectly, from one year's end to the other. He preached but one doctrine—a doctrine he had by heart; a doctrine which has caused more skirmishes than any other; a doctrine which no Church Councils nor Ecclesiastic Synods have ever been able to settle—that insolvable doctrine of moderation, only in Mr. Bradford's case moderation amounted to neutrality. It did not matter to him that his dogma had never received as yet the formal sanction of the Church. He preached it every Sunday.

If, however, this satisfied the few, it offended the many. That which was a suppressed murmur became a distinct and audible cry. On Mr. Bradford it had no effect. On this subject he was false to his own creed. It was a question which could not have two sides to it. His axiom was, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." His firm conviction was that it was possible; and the way in which it was possible was to avoid debatable subjects —"vain janglings" he would have styled them. He was not unduly disturbed of conscience by this course. He really loved peace, and thought that any good was dearly purchased that ruffled the stream of public placidity. Mr. Bradford, if the truth must be known, was not a man of any deep spiritual convictions. He was a quiet, cheerfully-disposed gentleman. He would have made a capital squire. His idea of the clergyman was, that he should smooth down ruffled feeling rather than awaken it; he should be a kind of parish mediator; he should lay himself out to prevent quarrels, to allay wraths, to bring about reconciliations—in general, to promote a kindly fellowship. This out of doors. In the pulpit he must enforce morality and gentleness of life, and of course moderation, *i.e.*, neutrality of opinion. There are a few places where it is possible that Mr. Bradford would have been idolized. At Lackington he caused

that which he most dreaded; he not merely failed to keep down the smouldering fire, he became himself fuel and was added to the flame.

To none of the Lackington people was this new doctrine, or abstinence from doctrine, more unpleasing than to the family that dwelt in the Grange. They were the more angry because there was a suspicion abroad in certain circles, that of legal right the last presentation to the living rested with the Lexleys. Originally, the appointment had been an alternate one; but the Puritan Lexley, already alluded to, had allowed his right to lapse, and no after-descendant had chosen to set about the recovery of it.

Now that his mind was so much exercised by Mr. Bradford's presence in the parish, the remembrance of this former privilege rankled very deeply in the heart of Ralph Lexley; and though far too aged—he had passed his ninetieth year—to interfere in such a business himself, he was pleased that his son John, himself verging upon septuagenarianism, should take up the matter. But John disliked lawyers, and he disliked even more the anxieties and harassments that would be imposed upon him. The thought of possible heavy expense also frightened him. He was at this time in a far more feeble state than his father. He thought, and his doctor thought, that his days were numbered; and even if such a suit terminated

as he desired, the end would be so far off that he would not be alive to act upon his restored prerogative.

As he lay upon his bed he revolved many plans in his mind. He recalled the powerful influence of the Romish gentry in the neighbourhood. He counted up the acres, thousands in number, that lay in Catholic hands. With the exception of the Grewby and Lexley properties, the surrounding territory, with its influence and wealth, belonged to those whom tradition, instinct, and education had taught him to abhor. He recalled to mind that it was rumoured on every side that the Papists where about to make special efforts in regard to Lackington. A new church was to be built by them, and four priests were already appointed to the foundation. Lackington was to be won in a mass, as well as by the Mass. And just when a counter effort was to be organized a rector had been appointed of such easy and placid deportment as we have described. Mr. Lexley lay anxious, moody, and fretful. What must be done? Something bold and uncompromising, something that would startle friend and foe alike. A Protestant Defence Association duly inaugurated and presided over by the rector, would be the best commencement of the fray. It would, at least, be the first blast of the trump that should call to war.

Sick men do things quickly. A servant was despatched with a note, and speedily Mr. Bradford came to his bedside. Nobody could be kinder to the infirm than the rector. His cheery manner was wont to dispel the outward gloom, even if he had little spiritual salve for the patient. But he failed this morning. Mr. Lexley scarcely waited for his greeting, warm and cheery, and ere five minutes were gone he had relieved himself of his pent-up feelings, and his proposal, also. Mr. Bradford condoled with him upon his anxious frame, and soothingly, but none the less decidedly, rejected his offer. The invalid was in a state of mind irritable and quick to decide and act upon impulse. He said no more, but as soon as the rector was gone he sent for Isaac Curling, the clerk, and ordered his cushions and kneeling-stools to be taken in a hand-cart to the door of the Rev. Thomas Juggins, Baptist minister, with a note requesting him to adapt their size and shape to such pew in Zion Chapel as he should be pleased to allot to him and his family. At the same time he sent another note to the rector, shortly informing him that he had retired from his position as churchwarden. He added that his son, whom he had consulted in the matter, was thoroughly agreed with him in this resolution to quit the parish church.

This step caused indeed a sensation. Lackington

was small enough yet to be electrified to its widest limits by anything that nearly touched one of its leading inhabitants. The rector was grieved, and did his utmost to win back the recalcitrant to his place again; but in vain. The Church people were sorry to lose the Grange family; and while they did not think it necessary to follow in their wake, none the less were the majority of them secretly pleased for the moment that such an astounding event should have occurred. It would awaken the sleepers, at any rate, and show the rector what Lackington felt on a subject like this. The heart of the Rev. Thomas Juggins was full to the brim. In the conversion of the father, old and feeble as he was, and that of his son, he saw the conversion of the whole family, now and in the future. For him it had been reserved to win over to the great cause of the Baptists one of the most influential families of the neighbourhood. Mr. Juggins was a good man; and he thanked God with all earnestness that a brand had been plucked from the burning, and that the Church of England, which was but a stepping-stone to the Church across the water, had been compelled to deliver up into his safer keeping one of her most substantial supporters. Mr. Lexley's request for a pew was attended to with an alacrity worthy the cause. Two pews were quickly turned into one—some crimson material had lined

the backs thereof before six hours had elapsed—the cushions and stools were in their proper places; and on the Sunday following, before a large and intensely interested congregation, so interested that many stood on the seats, and one old woman waved her stick, old Mr. Lexley was to be seen slowly creeping up the middle aisle, borne on one side by his son, on the other by the chief deacon, Mr. Ebenezer Emlott; and in the rear, supporting not the invalid, but the occasion itself, came four or five of the chapel dignitaries.

These events following upon the public anouncement that a mill was in contemplation, caused all but an absolute severance betwixt Grewby Park and Lexley Grange. Their formal visits became still more formal, their starched courtesies still more stiff. The younger members of the two families had been wont to meet with more or less frequency. This ceased. In this matter the Lexleys were as determinate as their neighbours. The Grewbys were on terms of friendship with nearly all the Catholic gentry of the district; and how plentiful they are in this part of Brockborough, I have already said. The Lexleys did not wish their children to cultivate such acquaintances. Thus things came to a pass, indeed.

CHAPTER IV.

"*D. Pedro.* What secret hath held you here, that you followed not to Leonato's?"—*Much Ado About Nothing.*

THE Lexleys had not resolved to set up the mill without excuse. The family estate was not a large one, and it was strictly entailed. About the time of the event recorded at the close of our last chapter, a somewhat curious complication had arisen. The Lexleys had always been looked upon as long livers. Various stories anent their longevity, and corroborated by the registers, and inscriptions in the parish church, had been handed down; but it was reserved for these later days to witness to a state of things which, while it transcended all preceding traditions, made the position of the family at the Grange not of the most comfortable. The plain truth was that there were no less than three eldest sons each looking to his immediate progenitor for the fulfilment of his natural wants. Mr. John Lexley, the hero of the Baptist

chapel affair, looked to Mr. Ralph Lexley, head of the family, for a liberal competency; Ralph junior, his son, to Mr. John for a bare sufficiency; and Master Johnnie, son and heir to Ralph, junior, so far as he could declare his wishes, to that gentleman for the absolute necessities of extremely juvenile life. A pap-bowl and a rocking-horse, 'tis true, completed his highest ambition for the present, but such moderate aspirations as these they all knew could not last.

I have said that Mr. Ralph Lexley, in his ninety-somethingth year, was in possession. This was a fact. Out in the world, Mr. John Lexley could do as he liked, and his exploits with Mr. Bradford proved it. But at home his father was supreme. He was hale, hearty, despotic, and a despiser of spectacles; contented with a corner, and yet ever and anon issuing forth and declaring that they had pushed him there, and that he was no longer master. Then his son John, aged seventy, had to give way, and, of course, his son with him.

When this son—the already mentioned Ralph junior, married, and John the second appeared on the scene, there was a commotion indeed. There had always been a considerable amount of rejoicing in the Grange at the birth of the heir, and as the heir had always been forthcoming in the most satisfactory of manners, the festivities, with the difference that the

interval was one of years instead of months, had come to be looked upon as events that went very much by the calendar. But it must be confessed that when the advent of John the second was chronicled, a considerable damper seemed to have fallen upon the Grange. It may have increased the angry consternation of the first Ralph, and his son and heir, the first John, that Master Johnnie was altogether unexpected. The news of his birth in London was their earliest intimation of his father's marriage. There was a species of aggravation in this, and Mr. Lexley the eldest felt it to be such. He was pleased to take this concealment as a personal rebuke for not having shifted himself out of the way, and vowed that if his children and grandchildren did not show him proper respect he would see himself into the second century of his existence—which he nearly did.

There can be no mistake that the fourth generation was not welcome. I do not say he was ill-treated. I do not cast the shadow of a suspicion on the method by which he was put into long clothes and weaned. I believed he was carefully physicked at stated intervals of a few days. There was never, I am convinced, a thought of putting him out of the way. Nevertheless, if not put, he was kept, out of the way. He was never seen in the flesh by the two elder gentlemen. His childhood was passed in the big capital. It had been

hard to settle into comfortable spheres all the children of the first Ralph. It had been still harder to provide for John's son Ralph, number two. But this did not affect the old gentleman. He had objected to his own son marrying as too young, when at the ripe age of forty-one he came for his consent; and when these scruples had been removed, he had made it a condition that if a third generation should appear, they should be clothed and fed entirely at the expense of him who had been responsible for their birth. All this John had done, but with no little difficulty, his allowance being small. The birth of the younger John was an awkward event, there could be no mistake about it.

So far as the facts could be made out by gossiping people, they were thus: Ralph Lexley the younger had gone to the metropolis, intending to extend his journey to the west. He wished to see Exeter and Cornwall. He was not very strong at the time, and there was nothing of consequence to keep him at home. As it afterwards turned out, he did not leave London, whither he had first turned his steps, till within a few days of the stipulated time for his return. He then took a quick journey somewhere in Kent, nobody knew where precisely, and within a very few days was back again in his London lodgings. From thence he came direct home. This curious departure

from his original plan did not attract much notice. He was old enough to take care of himself, and to give effect to his own likes and dislikes.

But when a very few months had elapsed and he again expressed a desire to visit the south, it could not help but that some little curiosity was aroused, and the money question became a difficulty. Owing to the good-nature of his father—for his grandfather would do nothing—he found himself once more in the gay city. His letters were short, but in all he expressed himself as well and happy. London suited him; he was much stronger than he had been; and he had met by accident with his old schoolfellow, Lieutenant Grewby; and that which had failed to happen at Lackington, had come about in the capital—the two young men had renewed a slight intimacy.

When Ralph Lexley returned the second time it was speedily noticed that he was not quite the same man as before. The regular but somewhat monotonous life of the Grange had ceased to be enjoyable to him. He did not care, seemingly, to talk to his father so much. He did not take that active interest in the chapel question he had formerly displayed. He was at times moody and strangely quiet, and was sensitive to questionings thereupon. He would even become peevish and fretful, a disposition

quite foreign to his nature. It was noticed, too, that he was almost always up early now; he didn't care to lie in bed as he was sometimes wont. He would stroll out regularly before breakfast, and catch the postman before he reached the lodge-gate.

But the time when all these little mysteries was to be cleared up arrived. Ralph told his father his secret. He had met a young lady almost immediately after his first arrival in London, a governess. He had fallen in love with her, and before he had had time to reflect on his position and his ability to maintain a wife and prospective family, he had married her. There was a little boy already born as a result of their union. I have already said that the birth of this representative of a fourth generation was not a welcome one. But it brought things to a crisis. If Ralph chose to marry and beget children, he must also choose to support them. The mill scheme was again renewed. Several times at an interval of a year or two it had been debated. It must now be carried out. A mill must be built on the estate where it touched upon the town; and Ralph the second must give up his lazy and driftless life in the capital, although he had wife and child there, and use his wits and energies with those of his father—not to say the older gentleman—to make it pay; and thus the Lexleys, even to the third and fourth generation,

might cherish a hope that they could live in moderate affluence, and yet the senior members of that family would no longer be tortured by the conviction that they were in the way.

It was fated that neither of the two senior Lexleys should see their little descendant. There seemed to be a certain amount of mystery connected with this marriage, even after the first mystery had been cleared up; for Ralph the younger made no hint of bringing his wife to his own county. The elder ones did not object to this at first, since they were both displeased at the secrecy of the affair, the marriage having been consummated at least two years before it was made known. When at length curiosity began to prevail over anger, it was suggested that since he had married a wife, and there was nothing more to be said on that head, he had better take a house near the mill, and show her to his kinsmen and friends. To this Ralph seemed to assent; but it was wonderful how slow he was in carrying out the plan. First, he could not find a suitable house—they were all either too large or too small; then he could not determine to bring her just then, as she was excessively weak, and the doctor had forbidden her to travel. Then the winter came on, and it was perfectly impossible, her medical adviser had said, that she should begin a North English life at that season of the year. Thus

it was put off and off till the oldest of the two old men died.

Mr. John Lexley survived his father but a year. After being heir for more than seventy years, he was actual possessor for twelve months. Yet he also never saw his grandchild. Within three months of the death of his grandfather, Ralph Lexley lost his wife. It was evidently true, therefore, what he had said about the delicacy of her health. The boy was then about two years old, and had been at once committed to the charge of his mother's relatives. By this time John Lexley was really anxious to see the boy upon whom the honours, such as they were, of the Grange estate were to fall. Nevertheless, whenever his coming to Lackington was referred to, his father passed off the matter. He showed a desire also to avoid the topic. Indeed, for some reason unknown, he made the boy himself as little as possible the subject of conversation. Mr. Lexley senior was not too old to see that this was strange behaviour; and yet the son's excuse sounded natural enough. There would be no one to superintend the child's welfare at the Grange; he had not even an aunt living on his father's side. All the females, the natural guardians of young children, were on the mother's side. She had a sister, and this sister and the little boy's grandmother would be only too thankful to take charge of their dear

dead one's offspring. Besides, the mother herself had implored him with her dying breath to let the child stay with her relatives until such time as the necessity for his removal to Lackington arose. His constitution was weak, and he was not able to battle with the rough and keen air of the hill district that separated Brockborough from Dampshire. So it went on; and when Johnnie came to live at the Grange the two elder Lexleys lay side by side in the family vault at Lackington church.

But ere the second died, he gave full proof of his devoted adherence to the new cause he had espoused. He never entered the parish church again alive. It was curious, too, to note how his health had seemingly been re-established by the excitement of that period.

Ralph Lexley was in London, on a visit to his child, when the news came that his father was dying. He came with all speed back, and found that the tidings was true. Indeed, he was barely in time to see him alive; and when he rushed into the bed-room he saw the minister and Ebenezer Emlott, one on each side, engaged in earnest converse with the invalid, who was propped up partly by pillows and partly by the interlaced arms of the two Baptists. As he entered they broke off their talk, seemed slightly confused, and met his eye with a disturbed look, which had something of suspicion in it. It seemed

to touch some chord within, for he looked equally uneasy; and thus the greeting, that was intended to be so warm and filial, was constrained.

"You're just in time, Ralph, lad," said his father, looking at him with a fixedness that was unusual. Something in the tone and look made Ralph feel that he had been the subject of their immediate conversation.

"Thank God, I am here, then," he replied. "But is it really so bad as that, father?"

"Ay, lad, it's as bad or good as that. But I must say one or two things whilst there's time. What's that you were saying to me, Emlott, just before Ralph came in?" Whatever it was he had to say, he seemed inclined to let the deacon say it for him.

"Well, Mr. Ralph, it is just this; for it's no time to hang fire, and fence, and such like. Your father has been a true champion in the cause. The truth has prevailed, and mightily prevailed, through his taking such a stand as he did more than six years ago; and Lackington has been saved by that act of your father's. I ask you, Mr. Ralph, and your father asks you—I am right there, am I not, Mr. Lexley?"

"Yes, I think so, yes—quite right," whispered the old man.

"Your father asks you, and the chapel asks you, is Lackington to fall back? Is the oppressor to

recover his strength, and to come down like a wolf on the defenceless fold? Is the good seed still to bear fruit? Your father has been a tower of strength against the face of the enemy." Emlott always mingled his illustrations thus.

"Only a reed, at the best, I fear," murmured the dying man.

"Will you be a tower too, Mr. Ralph? There has been a kind o' whispering among many that Mr. Ralph is not so zealous as he used to be—that he does not take so keen an interest in the cause as oncet he did."

"Ralph," broke in his father, "you'll be true, lad, I know, won't you?"

"Yes, father, I'll be true, don't fear," said Ralph, though he seemed unwilling to meet his eye. His head was half turned, and he looked troubled.

"They've been doubting you to me, but I didn't believe it, lad—eh?"

"That's right, father; *you* won't doubt me, I know."

"Never, my lad, and least now."

The old man seemed satisfied. He fell back, and though he survived six hours, he did not seem inclined to talk; but he died with Ralph's hand in his, and the clasp had never been relaxed since his son had reached the bedside.

He was buried in the church. Mr. Emlott had made one allusion to the subject, but only one. He was not encouraged to proceed. Mr. Lexley was a Lexley. His ancestor, of Puritan notoriety, even he slept 'neath a marble canopy—in the north aisle. Perhaps the sick man did not quite catch the drift of Ebenezer's remark, for he made no response; but he had a manner about him which that gentleman thoroughly understood. He was buried, I say, in the family vault.

CHAPTER V.

"By my Christendom,
So I were out of prison and kept sheep,
I should be merry as the day is long:
And so I would be here, but that I doubt
My uncle practises more harm to me:
He is afraid of me, and I of him."

King John.

RALPH LEXLEY was not quite the convert the people of Zion had expected. The benefits of a victory depend largely on the immediate action to which it opens the way. It must be followed up, and at once. When Ralph's father had come over to them, neither Mr. Juggins, nor Mr. Emlott, nor the congregation were so dense as to suppose that they might take repose. The Chapel had defeated the Church, and in a good and patriotic cause. The Chapel must now and instantly follow up its triumph by a kind of military movement, not on Mr. Bradford so much as the Lexleys. They must hold their vantage; and to do so they must make the son, even more than the

father, feel the importance of the deed that both had set hands too. It must be confessed that the Rev. Thomas Juggins would have been scarcely sufficient for this had be been unaided by Ebenezer Emlott.

Emlott was young, scarce yet in the prime of life. He was energetic in action, and ambitious of design. To these two qualities he owed his hitherto success in life. And he had been successful. He was not yet a rich man—far from it—but everybody knew that he was going to be. There are thousands of people who lack the gift to get on themselves, who can mark and discriminate upon the gift in others.

Ebenezer Emlott and his sister Jane, she being about thirty years of age and he thirty-five, were the children of a greengrocer who had prospered much in that vocation, and helped to found the chapel round the corner. Men who have sprung are possessed of two kinds of pride—the pride of concealment, and that of publicity. While one man will strain every nerve to hide from prying eyes, always futilely, the low depth from which he has risen, another will blazon it at every turn. He will season all his talk with it. He will parade the ladder he has mounted, on the platform, under plea of encouraging the young men to erect one for themselves; and he does not object to describe how much filth and mud the ladder rests on, if he can only display himself

as having reached the top. He will turn up his trousers and display his muddy boots, that it may set off his new and glossy and shiny hat. He is the kind of man, too, to frequent religious meetings, and then he will easily drag in his success under excuse of ascribing it all to Providence. Nevertheless, while he is thus ever thanking Providence in public for its bounty toward him—for then he can make Providence a plea for introducing the topic—he of all men least permits Providence to act for him in any of the relations of life. Above all, he never trusts Providence with his business. No man looks more carefully to the markets than he. He goes to bed late, he rises early, he allows no man to do his work for him—he puts confidence in none.

Ebenezer Emlott, after his first successes—that is, after his father was dead, and he had launched in the staple manufacture of the district—began with the pride of publicity; but he afterwards changed his tactics, gave up thanking Providence in public, and strove with all his powers to throw his antecedents into obscurity. He was encouraged in this by others; for the more successful he grew the less were his less fortunate associates inclined to remind him of the past. Clinging to the skirts of his robe, he might drag them up with him; so they fell invariably to expatiating upon the richness of that garment upon

which they fastened their grasp. In a few years, and almost by the time our story opens, Ebenezer Emlott, with all his intelligence and cunning—and he had both—imagined that everybody had forgotten the abyss out of which he had sprung. The greengrocery business, under other hands, still throve and displayed its cabbages round the corner; and yet, with that peculiar density that belongs to such clever men as he, it never occurred to him that the chapel folk, as they streamed out of a Sunday, would point an occasional friend to the closed shutters, and say that Ebenezer Emlott, the deacon, had started life with a potato in one hand and a balance in the other.

When Mr. Lexley lay dying, it was agreed between the deacon and the minister, that Ralph Lexley must be made theirs. If necessary, he must be bound with cords. Hence their late course of action. No sooner was the old gentleman laid by the still older gentleman, not so long ago deceased, than the deacon was closeted with Mr. Juggins. The minister was as clay in the potter's hands. The drift of everything that was said was this—due caution was to be exercised at this delicate stage of affairs. There was to be a large tea-meeting next week. On no account must the new Mr. Lexley be asked to take the chair—his father's death was too recent. None the less must it be hinted to him that he would

have been asked to do so had not his bereavement prevented. He must on no account be pressed to take his father's place as one of their leading patrons; he must be quietly thrust into the office, and treated as such. They must not congratulate themselves in his presence on having secured such a prop to their interests; they must congratulate him on having made such a bold stand, or on having had a father who had done such a commendable thing for him. The minister must do his part, but not overdo it. Let there be a suitable eulogy at proper intervals. To bind the son they must make a hero of the parent. Such and other scraps of advice did Mr. Emlott give to his spiritual pastor; and, as there was nothing in the suggestions of a dishonourable nature, that good man listened and obeyed. If the exhortation of his deacon smacked rather of worldly prudence, both the deacon and the pastor could have quoted many utterances of St. Paul to prove that worldly prudence is not to be ignored. Probably Mr. Juggins acted wisely when he left all these matters to Emlott's superior discrimination. He had practically rendered obedience to the shrewd deacon for several years past.

All things went favourably. Whether due to Ebenezer's tact or otherwise, Ralph Lexley showed no disposition to break with his new associates. 'Tis true he displayed no activity—rather the reverse; but

this was easily to be accounted for. He had had many troubles of late. His spirit was heavy within him. They must wait awhile. Sufficient for the present that he was an habitual attendant at Zion.

Mr. Juggins had neither daughter nor sister. Mr. Emlott had a sister—two in reality, but one was married, and away; the younger, Jane, lived with him. Once it had been thought, but that was a matter of six years ago or more, that the pastor had a liking for Jane Emlott, and that she had a decided partiality for the minister. There may have been some ground for the gossip—not that any ground is necessary in such things—but it had never come about. Mr. Juggins married somebody else, and Jane had not been led to the altar. She was neither crabbed nor peevish; yet a slight tendency to a pinched expression gathering upon her cheeks, told her as well as others that what charms she had erewhile possessed—and she had had some—were past their zenith. I do not suppose that Ebenezer took Jane at once into his confidence; but one thing is certain, he had not made his third visit to the Grange before he had determined that she should be its mistress. But he kept this of course from Mr. Juggins.

As soon as Ralph Lexley found himself really alone, he began to miss his boy. The yearning for his companionship became a yearning that could not

be suppressed. He told his trouble to his sympathizers, and Emlott made him come to his own house to a quiet cup of tea. There, in the company of his sister, with no one else, Ralph unbosomed himself. He must have his boy. He was going in a few days to London on a matter of business—he scarcely concealed that he had made the business—and he knew it would be impossible to return without him. Jane suggested that he should bring back his sister-in-law, or the child's grandmother; but at this Ralph blushed till a crimson flush overspread the whole of his face, and he stammered out that they could not come; there were circumstances that prevented such a thing, that he had thought over it and come to the conclusion that such an arrangement would be impossible. At this Ebenezer looked immensely relieved; and while he refrained his curiosity as to the lets and hindrances hinted at, he declared his belief that Mr. Lexley had no doubt carefully considered this scheme—it was but natural—and had come to a right conclusion.

Ralph Lexley began to look upon the Emlotts as his best friends. The Grewbys had practically deserted him. His Church acquaintances had coldly extended their sympathies on his bereavement. The Baptists of position were few, and of these the Emlotts had shown an apparently real desire to

solace him in his troubles. They had entered into his conflicting plans about his child. They had shown a delicate appreciation of his difficulty. They had not inquired too deeply into the seeming mystery of his separation from his boy. What wonder that he freely sought their society, and that at length a way of escape from his difficulties dawned upon him. Why not marry?—such had been Ebenezer's last hint. Why not marry Jane Emlott?—that had been his own immediate and mental response. He did not know much of her. What little he had seen of her he liked. She seemed sympathetic enough. She appeared like one who would undertake a trust with conscientious earnestness. She loved children—he had heard her say so, and she had said it without a simper. He had not a doubt in his mind that, while this was a statement that all women made, she had a sentiment on this point deeper than that commonplace usually implied. He had heard many say it who, half an hour afterwards, had spoken with far more lavish affection of the lap-dog in their bosoms. He had heard some few say it who had slapped or pinched a child five minutes afterwards for some trivial and infantine misdemeanour. He had heard others assert it gushingly with a simper and a blush. But when Jane Emlott said it, she said it with a quiet and staid, and yet withal maternal, intenseness, which he knew to

be genuine. And Jane Emlott did love children, and was prepared to spend and be spent in her love for them. But what nature would often sunder the most far, necessity often conjoins the most closely. The perils of step-relationship Jane knew as little of as Ralph Lexley.

Ralph did not go to London—that is, not immediately. He could wait a few months now. It is always a matter of course that no one is surprised when two people become engaged. "I told you so," is the familiar greeting for just three days in place of the ordinary "How do y' do?" Nevertheless, this marriage between Ralph Lexley and Jane Emlott did astonish a great many people. Lackington had much to say about it, and as it was no business of theirs, of course they expressed their minds freely upon the subject. Almost every one agreed that it was strange; and all, without exception, declared that Ebenezer Emlott's sister had done well. But it was one more rivet in the chain that dragged down the Lexleys. On their return from the honeymoon, the Grewbys never called.

It may seem strange that Johnnie Lexley had to face prejudice when he arrived. To a place like Lackington, only fresh bestirring itself to the activities of a commercial position, gossip is a necessity of life; and if the Emlotts had not been curious about

Johnnie's antecedents they had had reasons for such a frame. The rest of the Lackington world had not. Nothing pleased them more than a mystery, provided that, after their inquisitive spirit had been duly and sufficiently fed, the mystery was cleared up. But a mystery that was to remain a mystery, they objected to as positively sinful. Depend upon it, there was wrong where daylight was dreaded. Ralph Lexley had hitherto made no sign. It was manifest that he did not wish his boy to be the subject of their curious queries. Up to the time of his coming to the Grange no one was one iota wiser than his neighbour. No wonder there was already a prejudice against him. But it was still worse after his father had fetched him. The poor little lad was tall and ungainly for his years. He was only six ; had a big, innocent, almost half-witted face ; his hair was long and unkempt ; his eyes grey, and apprehensive, as if he was on the eve of being startled ; and an indefinable air of pensive mournfulness sate with a sad naturalness upon his face. A poet would have said he was beautiful, and written a sonnet upon him. Lackington said he was a little heathen-looking boy, and added in a loud whisper that he was not all there. But a circumstance arose which caused no little uneasiness.

One day Ebenezer came to the Grange. He came to study the child, as he frankly said to his sister.

With this object he had taken the child on his knee; and the little lad had uttered such a cry of real terror, as he looked up into his face, that Ralph, who was near, had for the first time spoken angrily, and asked him not to frighten the boy so.

"He had no need to shriek," put in Jane. "Ebenezer meant to be kind to him."

"But he is so sensitive; he must not be handled roughly, and by one who is yet a stranger."

"Sensitiveness is a quality that should be eradicated afore children are out o' long clothes," said Ebenezer, oracularly. "Sensitiveness never drove a bargain, that I ever saw. Depend upon it, the sooner sensitiveness makes way for sensibleness, the better for business. I was never sensitive" (this was strictly true); "and, thank Heaven, I've managed so far pretty comfortable without it." This was true also.

Ralph uttered no retort, but he took Johnnie on his knee, in one corner, and began to talk to him in a whisper.

Johnnie's eyes glistened, and he clung to his father's hand with a wonderful tenacity; but he uttered scarcely a syllable himself. He seemed as if he had never learnt to talk, or as if his tongue, like his eyes, were under a spell. Ebenezer had already begun to dislike the child. Jane was expecting one of her own, and was at present very self-absorbed.

"When you have done with that child, Ralph, perhaps you will listen to me," said Ebenezer, after watching them for several minutes with an anything but friendly observation. It was strange how rapidly Ebenezer's will had subjected Ralph Lexley's to itself. But when once Jane was led to the Grange as its mistress, and Ebenezer himself had gauged his brother-in-law's character, he had formed certain conclusions, and on these he had acted and intended still to act. He discovered that he could rule Ralph, and he determined that he would do so—for his own, that is, Ebenezer's sake, for business is business, even between relatives, especially by marriage—and also for the chapel's sake. *Éclat* won to Zion was *éclat* for Ebenezer.

"What do you intend to do about that child?"

"What do you mean?—he will stay here," said Ralph quickly.

"Yes, yes, of course; but don't you see that he will want developing?" answered Ebenezer, touching his forehead in a suggestive fashion,—"wants something here."

"What do you mean by 'wants'?" put in Ralph irritably. "'Wants' is so vague; it may mean he lacks something, or that he wishes for something—he's not old enough to have all his wishes gratified, surely."

"Perhaps not; but he wants something, neverthe-

less. He never talks, except to you, and he looks queer-like. I've thought of a plan—let Juggins examine him."

"His head, do you mean?"

"Well, not anatomically, but in a Christian-like manner, just to see what he knows, and what's wrong with him, if there is anything wrong. May be it's only shyness, or what you call sensitiveness. Anyway it won't pay. He'll never get on as he is. We must get at his intelligence, don't you see? Intelligence is everything. If we find he has plenty, so much the better for him, and for us all." It was always "we" and "us" with Ebenezer now. "If he has only a little, well, it can't be helped, and it's something to go to work upon. Yes, he must see Juggins, there's no question about that," he added decidedly.

Ralph made many objections; but Jane came in, and sided with her brother—not unkindly, but as if she were uneasy about the child. She had been all, nearly all, that the father could wish so far; at any rate, he had not betrayed any anxiety hitherto on that score. And so far as duty was concerned none could possibly have found a flaw in the stepmother's treatment. Opposed by Jane, Ralph gave way; but only after the promise had been given that Juggins' visit should be a short one, and that he himself should be in waiting at the door. He could not

persuade them to let him be present. Ebenezer put it to him practically, if they could hope to do anything with the child while his father was by. With this condition Mr. Lexley gave way, but he was manifestly uncomfortable.

"He's too young to talk much," he said, it would seem as if in a tone of relief. "I don't see what good can come of it; but if you both think it necessary, so be it."

The next day Johnnie faced the minister and his chief coadjutor in his father's library. Ebenezer never wasted time. He began with a question, evidently one of a series, before Mr. Juggins had concluded that preparatory blow of his nose to which his congregation were so familiar.

"Johnnie, this gentleman wishes to ask you several questions, which I dare say you will answer to his entire satisfaction. Where did you come from when you came here?"

Johnnie stared affrightedly at his interlocutor, and then looked at the door, as if to run. He said nothing.

"Did you come from London, my little man?" said the minister, patting him kindly on the cheek.

The boy looked at Mr. Juggins for one brief moment, and then said "Yes." He moved about a foot nearer the pastor.

"Did you live with your aunt?" said Ebenezer.

Johnnie nodded.

"And your grandmother?" added Mr. Juggins.

Johnnie again nodded.

"Who made you?" said Ebenezer solemnly.

"God." The boy was trembling visibly, but he said this clearly. The two inquisitors gazed at one another with a look of satisfaction.

"Did you ever go to a place of worship in London?"

Johnnie did not seem to understand. He stared blankly at both.

"Did your aunt take you to church?" put in the minister, still kindly.

"Yes."

"What church?" questioned Ebenezer sternly.

Johnnie's legs nearly gave way with fright. He gulped down a sob, and seized convulsively upon Mr. Juggins' knee.

"Did any one from the church ever speak to you?"

Memories seemed to awaken in the child—pleasant ones. The vacant expression was gone. "Mr. Hugnot," he said eagerly.

Ebenezer looked steadily at the boy. He asked many questions with a desire to know what was the creed of this Mr. Hugnot, of whom the child was

evidently fond; but he could elicit nothing satisfactory. "Did he teach you anything?"

"Yes."

"Can you repeat anything he taught you?"

Johnnie did not seem to remember.

"Can you say the Lord's Prayer?"

No response.

"You can say the Lord's Prayer, surely. 'Our Father,' you know," said Mr. Juggins, patting him on the cheek.

"Oh yes. 'Pater noster qui es in cœlis. Sanctificetur nomen tuum. Adveniat regnum tuum. Fiat voluntas tua sicut in cœlo et in terra. Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie. Et dimitte nobis debita nostra——'"

The boy had got so far with great rapidity, when he suddenly stopped. Ebenezer was gasping for breath. Mr. Juggins was holding by the table.

"The Paternoster!" ejaculated the deacon.

"Latin!" exclaimed the minister.

"He's a Papist!" shrieked Ebenezer.

"I fear so," responded Juggins with a deep sigh.

"A child of Babylon—and he's not seven years old yet! I thought we should get at something before we had done. Boy, you can go. Ask your father to step in."

Johnnie rushed out of the room, and threw himself,

sobbing, into his father's arms. "Papa, don't let me be with that man again."

"What man?—there were two."

"The man with the loud voice. Oh, he does so frighten me. Don't let him take me into that room again. I will be so good if you will keep him away."

Mr. Lexley strove to comfort the little boy, but for a while in vain. With convulsive clasps he clung to his father's knee. At length he was more tranquil. He nestled his head against his heart, and his breathing became more regular. By-and-by he fell asleep; but ever and anon there was a choking in his throat, and he would start up with a sudden cry.

Mr. Lexley in vain persisted that his boy was brought up under Protestant influences, and that he had married his mother at a Protestant church. From that day his domestic troubles began. His brother-in-law had discovered something, if not that which he had sought, in subjecting Johnnie to an inquisition. The lad was not absolutely devoid of intelligence; but his earliest associations must have been terribly demoralizing. Paternosters! Some day he must get at the bottom of this. There was a mystery overhanging Ralph Lexley's first marriage.

CHAPTER VI.

"Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear :
Where little fears grow great, great love grows there."
Hamlet.

TIME passed on, and the Baptists of Lackington were not altogether pleased with the conduct of their new member. The bold step taken by his father before his death, had led them into the expectation that a like dauntless front would be shown by the son. To a certain extent they had nothing of which to complain. Ralph Lexley was assuredly one of them. He had never entered the church since that tremendous step had been taken. He had associated himself in all the local relations that gather round and centre upon a place of worship, and its living body. All its more active agencies found in him substantial aid. His purse was open to all calls. Nevertheless, it could not be disguised that he lacked the spirit of his parent. He shrank manifestly from a personal interference in the affairs of the chapel. He did not

take that lead which his position and wealth entitled him to. Whatever prominence he took was the result of external pressure. It was not pride. This would not have been altogether unacceptable ; nay, it was the lack of that which in a measure discomposed them. If he had loftily claimed a leader's place, they would to a man, perhaps saving one, have given it him, and backed him up in it. If he had shown a fierce antagonism to the foe ; if he had accepted the chairmanship of the next public lecture on the "Modern Tactics of the Apostate Church," he would have been cheered to the echo. But he had done nothing of the kind. His highest ambition seemed to sink quietly into the subordinate position of a simple attendant at the chapel—to avoid publicity. The congregation, on the contrary, wished to keep up the glory of his conversion ; they were anxious to play him off against the common enemy, which was as much the Established Church as the Papal hierarchy. They had decided that this should be the commencement of an exciting agitation which should keep in arms the whole of the Lackington society for months, if not years, to come. Excitement was needed ; Zion had been asleep too long. Mr. Juggins was not so noisy as his predecessor. His natural temperament clashed with theirs. He was inclined to declare the true, rather than to denounce

the false; and to this Zion was not accustomed. It was one thing to set forth in its simplicity the doctrines of the chapel—it was another thing to set them off against the creeds of the surrounding churches. They preferred the latter. Mr. Juggins, to a certain extent, had disappointed them; but the tameness of Ralph Lexley disappointed them still more. To them his conduct was simply the result of pusillanimity and cowardice.

The relation of Emlott's story, told with fervid zeal and earnestness, spread far and wide. It was universally agreed that Ebenezer Emlott had acted like himself in so early making the discovery of Johnnie's antecedents. Every one was decided that he should carry on the work he had begun. He must take charge of the lad. He held the great responsibility in right of his connection. Before him lay the opportunity of doing a great good. Johnnie was the heir—he must be made theirs; theirs, as his grandfather was for such a brief period; theirs in zeal and resolution. Ebenezer could do this, and to him, therefore, they would look and rest content. Perhaps, too, the father might be aroused from his weakness and irresolution through the son.

It were a long task to relate all the domestic experiences of the Lexleys during the twenty-one years that elapsed between the occurrence of the

incidents we have been describing and the opening of our story. Mrs. Lexley had given birth to two children, both boys; Geoffrey alone survived infancy; the second died. Now that the first troubles of maternity were over she took again the interests of the chapel to her heart. Narrow-minded, bigoted, but conscientious, convinced that to her own body belonged, alone, the true principles of doctrine and practice, as laid down in the Gospels and Acts and Epistles of the New Testament, she determined that her children, be the obstacles what they might, should be trained in accordance with these views.

And Jane Lexley was prepared also to do her duty by Johnnie. He was not hers, and she did not take to the child. She had striven her best to hide this alike from her husband and the child. She had even taken herself to task on the score of duty. She had undertaken a responsibility. She knew that Mr. Lexley had been led to propose marriage to her because he fancied that she would be a mother to his boy. Since then she had discovered the irresolute will of the father, and she feared the son had inherited the weakness. If already she had come to be, without any desire on her own part, the ruling spirit in the Grange, she was not as yet conscious of her brother's full power. If it was necessary that at his age she had to guide, and even dictate, her husband's

conduct, how much more necessary, while the child was yet young, that she should eradicate what was weak, and strengthen the strong in him? She believed she could do it. She would have to give pain to both father and child, especially to the father, through the child; but brave in the conviction of duty, she gave herself over to the worst. Johnnie, like her own children, should be brought up under the shadow of the chapel; their associations should alone be made from thence. And she was determined, and she looked up for assistance, that she would ever remember that Johnnie was heir, and that his interests were to such extent above the interests of her own. Never, I believe, did woman set to duty more unreservedly than Jane Lexley.

But Mrs. Lexley was a mother. Despite all her efforts—and surely it was to be over-conscientious even to try—she loved her own the best—much the best. In some points Nature will not be brow-beat, and in no point less than in the maternal instincts. There are thousands of stepmothers who can love their charge, even with children of their own, and do their duty also by them. Jane could never love Johnnie. She could not understand him; and, worse than this, she misunderstood him. His characteristics were utterly different to those of her own child. His reticence she took for a sullen temper; his inclination to shrink

from her companionship she considered to be the offshoot of a rebellious spirit. Her own son, Geoffrey, clung to her knees and received her caresses with delight. Johnnie was slow to exhibit the signs of affection, and still slower to accept them. Geoffrey was as noisy as all children of his age. Johnnie was silent even in play. How could Mrs. Lexley give a love to Johnnie like that she gave her own? Duty seldom—can it ever truly control and regulate love? Mrs. Lexley began to think not. But duty can do right in despite of love. And so Mrs. Lexley fell back on duty.

Yes, she would do her duty. But to do her duty, as she saw, she must make a distinction between her own child and the other mother's child. Here, again, Mrs. Lexley had a long struggle with self. She had ever intended to do the exact opposite. Hitherto any difference made was to be in favour of Johnnie as heir. But to carry out her task it must not be so any longer. She must begin a treatment of the one child severer than that of the other; and yet the harsher-seeming rule must lie on him who was not her own. Jane was not sensitive, saving to one feeling—that of duty. Here sensitiveness was poignant, even to much pain. It was wholly unallied with the acute susceptibility of the father and son. They were sensitive even to the physical touch; it was a sensitiveness

that electrified alike soul and nerve; the mind was not more delicately strung than the frame. Jane's was entirely moral; it was only affected by declension from rectitude. Poor Jane! Conscience lay indeed hard upon her. But she took up her burden. People would remark the distinction she made; nevertheless, it must be done. Probably her husband would misjudge her; but it was for his sake as well as the child's. She would cleave to her method. Poor Jane—poor Johnnie—poor Ralph Lexley!

The fault of all this lay in one matter. Jane consulted her brother, rather than her husband. In all her anxieties to do right as concerning Johnnie, she sought Ebenezer's guiding hand. It was not the seeming mystery of Johnnie's birth that chafed her, but Johnnie himself. To her he seemed obtuse and sullen; and her brother was of the same opinion. Ebenezer undertook to instil some religious knowledge into him. He never concealed his dislike of the boy; and his failure to develope any clear perception of his creed into him galled him to the quick.

"He's the sullenest little brute I ever seed, Juggins; that's what it is," he said one day.

"But, Mr. Emlott—you'll excuse me, I'm sure, making the remark—arn't you beginning too far on? Isn't he too young, just a leetle too young, to under-

stand the doctrine?—a blessed doctrine, I know, a blessed doctrine indeed; but what can he know of Final Perseverance at his age?"

"Oh, I've not got so far as that—we're still at the Indefectibility of Grace."

"Indefectibility of Grace! But, Mr. Emlott—pray forgive me—do you think it quite judicious to—to——"

"Come, Juggins, you're not going to tell me that children are too young at nine or ten years of age to have the right way pointed out to them. 'Train up a child,' you know—that's the command. It don't say train up a middle-aged man, or a fellow as is verging o' threescore years an' ten."

"Yes, but 'milk for babes,' you know; that's of equally Divine authority."

"Milk, yes, if you can get it; but it's so diluted with wish-wash nowadays. Water's too cheap, that's what it is." This was a hit at Mr. Juggins' pulpit exhortations. "For my part, I don't object to a little drop o' brandy in the pap-bowl, if the child's weakly. Think what that lad's been nursed on in that sink of iniquity, London—eh?" Ebenezer's "Ehs" were like his head, bullet-shaped; and he hurled both, like missiles, against his foe.

"Ay, that's true," assented the minister, retreating a step backwards.

"Think of him, surrounded with a thousand

gross superstitions and blasphemies—idolatry rampant on every side—eh?"

"Ay, sad, very sad, no doubt." The minister was a clear yard away, and didn't mind so much.

"Of course it's no doubt. And we're to eradicate all that—eh?"

"True, very true," meekly acquiesced Mr. Juggins.

"Of course it's true. Come, Juggins, I didn't expect to have to be teaching the pastor of Zion Chapel as well as that brat of Lexley's. Hadn't you better look up your own foundations afore you tackle mine—eh?" This was said with an air of vulgar triumph. He had used the phrase several times lately at the class-meeting.

"I trust my foundation is sure," said the minister quietly. "Still, Mr. Emlott, do not think me ungrateful for all your interest in—in Zion Chapel, if I suggest that with the young, especially the very young, it should be 'line upon line.'"

"Oh yes, we all know that; but there are exceptions, you know." Nearly everything was an exception with Ebenezer, the rule having a very bad time of it.

From this short conversation it will be seen how Johnnie was like to fare with Ebenezer as coadjutor with Jane. By the former he was voted stupid and insensible. He was not so much wanting in the commonest perceptions of childhood as some had

said—he was sulky, obstinate, and intractable. This sullen humour must be removed, and Jane must do it. Poor Jane! she entered upon her work with sad but fixed purpose. She believed her brother, as a reader of character, to be without a rival.

CHAPTER VII.

"And a name was given to the Babe-Angel, and it was to be called Ge-Urania, because its production was of earth and heaven."—*Essays of Elia.*

ONE day, when all the land was yellow with shocks of wheat, the three children had gone out into the fields with the nurse. It was a beautiful afternoon in the late autumn—an afternoon when the waning year would seem to have snatched back from the tomb of midsummer some of its departed life. They wandered by hedgerows gay with flowers, and over which came a gentle gale laden with the scent of the ingathering harvest. The grasshoppers chirruped; and, high above, the unseen lark sang a still higher note. Here, as they paused to make themselves a wreath, the nurse fell in with one of the croppers. He was an acquaintance, and soon they fell into a deep talk.

The children went on with their play till Johnnie, somewhat wearied with the sport, stole round the corner of the lane, with no mischievous bent, but

tempted by the companionship of the scene—the waving elms, the sweet air, and all the wealth of the autumn time. Slowly he followed the beat of the road till he came to the brow of a steep slope. Below, ran a brimming stream, which afar down the vale looked like a silver thread that ran in and out of a patchwork of furze, and thorn, and sweet-brier. Across the river, the source of much music, were set large stones, various in size and shape, and all irregular; and in the meadow beyond was a church, in a yard surrounded with a hedgerow, and sheltered 'neath trees thick and sombre. The sward and mouldering stones beneath were covered by a shade; so cool it looked that, with one little glance behind, he prepared to seek it. He clambered down the slope and scaled the stones. He followed the little field-path till he reached a gate. It was open, and he entered. Through an avenue of clipped limes, he came upon a porch. Above he could see a great tower—old and grey, and mossed with lichen—and upon the slender mullions and over the hundred little panes, gleamed the mellow sun. He stood spell-bound; and while he stood there came upon his ear the sweet sound of seeming far-off music, and human voices attuning themselves to its key. His little breast heaved with an emotion he scarce could tell. A film came over his eyes.

He saw that through the porch the door was open. A spirit of liberty was abroad in his heart. He entered the church. Down the long and spacious aisle he saw no living one, but effigies in great store. At the end, in what seemed to him to be a second chapel, were some ten or twelve boys and men in white raiment. They seemed to him angels; and one who was chief sang, and they responded in harmonies so rich and soft, that, with the organ's tender swelling, he sank upon a seat and tried to recall where he had seen and heard something like this before; but he could not.

And while he did not cease to listen, his eye fell on several mural tablets, which he could not decipher, the lime-trees threw such a dark shade within. At his left side was a large extended monument, on which at full length lay a knight—so fearfully still. His armour seemed all plated, his gorget iron-clasped, and his battered morion looked as though it had really seen the field of war. The panel on the hither side had the simple figure of a child against it. She had wings, and all was alabaster in its whiteness. The lips were parted into a smile, and in the left hand was an olive branch. Beneath there was C. G., in Roman type, and the date 1403. He could not take his eyes off the little angel. He wished she was alive, that he might speak to her. He wished she had been

his sister, or wife — only boys had not wives, only sisters.

Still he looked, and listened, and still more weird-like grew the scene. A gentle spell came over him; he rested his head upon his arm, and had scarce fallen into a sweet waking dream, ere it had ushered him into a real one. But as he thus slumbered and dreamt, with a smile on his lips, he was aware of a rude clutch of the arm that propped his head; and his head fell against the cold marble panel, and the blood flowed.

He started back with horror, for he thought it was the marble knight himself that had got up and struck at him; but being still seized with a grasp of iron, he looked round, and saw the face of Ebenezer Emlott. No word was said, but Johnnie was led, tightly pressing with his free hand the spot where the panel had caught his head. He uttered no sound. There is a fear and quailing which is so intense that it is mute; and such was his. Nor did Ebenezer say aught. In solemn but dread silence they stalked athwart the meadow, across the stones, up the slope, through the lane, straight home; no pause made, no word said. Oh, how different was this returning walk from the other! But still the music was on his ear, and he saw the alabaster child, and the strain was sweet, and the little face looked, oh, so pityingly on his.

Ebenezer, still with a stern grip, led, or rather dragged, the culprit upstairs, into the tapestried room, which was next to the nursery, and was usually untenanted ; in fact, it was without furniture, saving for an antique cabinet and two high-backed, quaintly-carved chairs, of black and polished oak, in one of which Johnnie had once or twice been compelled to sit for half an hour by way of punishment—and punishment he had indeed deemed it. There Mr. Emlott left him, and, having carefully locked the door, went downstairs. He had never uttered a single word from first to last, neither had that look of grim and hard determination ever left his face.

Johnnie went to the window. It had stone mullions, and the panes of glass were of curious shapes, but all small. The lower portion was stained, and there were still here and there scraps of colour, with little heads and other objects, which betokened that once the whole had formed some pictorial design. He looked out with a kind of dazed feeling upon the upland, for beneath him the land rose quickly till it reached a covert of trees. The sun had set, but there were shafts of golden light that still illumined the landscape and brought out the distant background of hills at the left corner with a wondrous purple distinctness. Their soft glow seemed reflected upon the wall of the chamber, and upon himself. He

sat awhile in the mid-stream of this crimson flood, and still a soothed feeling rested upon him. He had not forgotten the music nor the knight, nor the little child-angel with its tender smile. He began to wonder who the knight might have been, whether he ever had wandered to the Crusades, or fought with closed visor in a tournament about which he had been lately reading in his history book. He quite forgot, or did not know, that this was but an effigy, and that the real soldier slept below. To him the figure had been a living thing; it had faced other knights, and there had been a contest, and he had laid his adversary in the dust, and then his own time had come, and he had been set there at full length, in all his panoply of war, to tell of his exploits.

Then he thought of the little child, so purely white, and the pitying smile she had given him, as he thought, just as he had turned the corner of the aisle. Was it some little girl the knight had saved in one of those battles in the East, or was it his own little daughter? How strange such a grim, stern warrior should have so gentle a face always beside him! What could she have to do with bloodshed? It was very curious altogether; he could not make that part out at all. On this he pondered awhile, and the time went on.

Then his eye fell on the tapestry. He knew the

story of the little maid, and Gehazi's lie; and this was it. He began to wonder why she should have been walking in the daytime in her night-gown, and without any bonnet on. How grand Naaman was, with that gold girdle and dazzling turban. Those two streaks all the way down to the left, to which the great captain is pointing with his spear, would be those two big rivers. What were their names? He could not remember. But he knew they were bigger than the river Jordan, and that must have been a big river, for the Bible was always speaking about it. And, oh, there was Gehazi—yes, that was his name;—what a scowl he had!—what a horrid man he looked! If Uncle Ebenezer had only those sandals on, and his stockings and trousers and coat off, and a thin strap round his waist, and a long, crooked stick in his hand, he would be very like Gehazi. He wondered if Ebenezer would have told the lie too. He couldn't quite make up his mind on that point; and he mused on this also for a while. He couldn't decide. He must look at Gehazi again. How was this? Only his white forehead was visible, and that darkly. He stared round him—it was night. The glimmering light had faded out of the hillside and the nearer woods, and he was alone, all by himself, in the tapestried room.

Just as he was beginning to be frightened the

door was unlocked, and Susan, the under-housemaid, came in. She was carrying a large bundle of clothes. Behind her came the butler with a large crib. They looked pityingly upon him, but said nothing. The little bed was soon made up.

"What is that for, Susie?" asked the boy with a slight tremble.

"For bad boys, I'm fear't, Master Johnnie. Anyhow, it's for you. How came you to offend Mister Ebenezer i' that fashion?"

"I don't know. Oh, Susie, you'll not leave me alone? I only went inside the church."

"Which church?"

"It's that one in the fields, over pretty stepping-stones. And, oh, there's such a beautiful child in it, all white, near a big knight."

"What's the child talking about? Why, you've been to the festival-service—dedication they call it, I think."

"What's that, Susie?"

"I don't know—leastways, not 'xactly. I believe it's i' honour of one of them saints. Eh, but Mr. Ebenezer will be angry! Poor child!" she added pityingly, as she saw the innocent, but pale face, looking up to her.

"Mayn't I go downstairs, Susie?"

"No; I've orders to see you undressed. You'll

have a nice night's rest, and then they'll forgi'e you in the morn. Don't be fear't; it's a comfortable room, and there are pretty pictures on the wall." Susie tried not to shudder, for she was as superstitious as the rest of her tribe. "Good-night, Master Johnnie. Go to sleep quickly, there's a good boy. Oh, it's a shame!" she whispered to herself as she was leaving the room.

"Susie, Susie!"

"Yes, luv."

"You'll leave—you won't take away the candle?"

"I was 'ticularly ordered not to leave you the candle. I'm very sorry."

"Oh, Susie, I'll give you anything—all I have, Susie" (starting up in bed); "I'll give you that humming-top if you'll only leave me the candle."

There's no telling what Susie might not have been moved to do; but Ebenezer's voice was heard on the steps. She hastily laid the child down again, kissed his pallid lips, and left the room. Some one locked the door. Johnnie knew it was not Susan, for she had gone straight along the passage with the candle.

A deep horror fell upon the lad.

He did not know how long it was after this—it seemed long—when a thrill of happiness went through him. He could hear a noise in the next room. The panel behind the bed was thin, much of it was

decayed, and the tapestry itself was in tatters here. It was the nurse's room, and she was going to bed. Here Geoffrey slept. Perhaps she had roused him. Blessed murmur of indistinct voices! As a traveller laves in the stream that has come unexpected in his path, so Johnnie sat up, plied his ear to the panel, and drank in the faint sounds.

But this did not last long. In a few minutes all was still again—how terribly still! Once more that sudden and awful horror came upon him. A trembling seized his body—a cold perspiration broke over his face. Indistinct visions flashed before his eyes, and out of them grew one that seemed to separate itself from the dark, and Gehazi stood at the foot of the crib. With a stifled scream he threw the clothes over his head, and turned himself low down in the bed. How his heart thumped and thumped!

By-and-by the swoon was passed; he drew his head out again. He tried to think. Perhaps he could think out those other thoughts. He went through a list of the English kings. Three times he stuck, mercifully enough, at Stephen. He could not think who succeeded Stephen. Who on earth could it be? He must begin again at William. There was William the Conqueror, of course; then William Rufus. He didn't like him a bit—he never had liked William Rufus. Then Henry the First, then Stephen.

He wasn't fond of Stephen, either; but he had a crooked back. He felt sorry for Stephen. Then came—who was it came after Stephen? How silly he was! Why, it was John, his own name. He laughed. It rather startled him. He began in a hurry again.

After he had despatched the English kings about eight times over, he went through Henry VIII.'s six wives, then the English counties, then the twelve sons of Jacob, carefully separating Rachel's children from Leah's, and Bilhah's from Zilpah's. This also was a difficult task, and welcomed accordingly. Then he bethought him of the twelve apostles; but they were easy, and then — suddenly he started — for a moment he quite forgot he was in the dark—he had never said his prayers. He had been too alarmed, and Susan too busy, to think about them.

What was he to do? He had never been allowed to say his prayers in bed. He did not know exactly why, but he believed it would be wrong to say them there. Dare he get up, and step down into that black gloom, and kneel on the cold floor? How could he expect God to take care of him in that terrible darkness if he did not repeat his evening prayer? He would do it while the great fear was off him. Slowly and stealthily the little boy slipped out of his crib—he was very frightened. He went with a quick but childlike fervour through his string

of simple petitions—on one knee only; and with the other ready poised, he sprang into bed again with a bound, and huddled up the clothes.

Then the horror began to dawn again. The darkness looked blacker than ever. And yet, however black it grew, he could see Gehazi, only Gehazi—not the little maid, nor Naaman—simply Gehazi. He did not shrink, nor did he this time hide himself beneath the sheets; he was fevered, and a delirious feeling came over him. He began to wander somewhat in his mind, and occasionally a moan escaped his lips. He fancied he was back in the church again, and he could hear the swelling strains of the organ, and the white-robed choristers chaunting music; but somehow, while the music was sweet, it was very sad. By-and-by he fancied that he saw the singing men and boys formed into a procession, and those in front lifted a little coffin, and with tapers lighted they walked, singing sweetly but sadly, down the aisle. Nearer and nearer they came till they reached the effigy of the knight, then they stopped, and the four boys unfastened the coffin, and lifted into the knight's arms a little white-robed child-angel, and he kissed it, and lay down again. It was the little child on the panel.

As thus he wandered on, conscious and yet strangely out of mind, feverish and yet composed,

he thought he heard the key turn in the door; but which door, the church's or that of his bed-room, he could not say. He looked, and in the dark he saw the little child-angel slowly enter, and draw nigh his bed. He knew where he was now—and, oh, how kind—oh, how sweet of the little child-angel to leave the grim knight, and come over the stepping-stones, and climb the slope, and cross the meadow, and all to comfort him in his loneliness! He opened his arms and the child-angel crept in.

"Johnnie, it's I."

"Yes, I know—you're the kind——"

"I'm Gipsy."

"Gipsy! Why, I've a little brother——"

"I heard you moaning and sobbing through the panel, and I've come to stay with you. What are you crying for?"

"I'm alone. You're sure you're Gipsy?"

"Oh yes. But why do you cry? Don't you like being alone?" Geoffrey was in the crib, too, now, nestling up to him.

"It frightens me? Doesn't it frighten you? You're sure you're Gipsy—not the little child-angel?"

"What's the matter with you?" merrily laughed the tiny boy. "Don't you know me?"

"You're laughing—arn't you frightened?"

"I like the dark. When nurse is asleep, I make

pictures in it—boys, and donkeys, and elephants, and——"

"But that would frighten me," said Johnnie.

How nice it was to hear Gipsy's voice — how sweetly it sounded! And he was laughing, too, only just now! How strange! He crept nearer still to Gipsy. He wished he would laugh again.

"You're not afraid, Johnnie?"

"Not now." He crept yet closer.

The little boy put his arm round the big boy, and drew his head lovingly on to his breast. And there it was the big boy fell upon a deep and placid sleep. The Book says "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." The same spirit henceforward overshadowed the soul of Johnnie for Gipsy, and it was reflected again from Gipsy to Johnnie. From that night they lived in a little world of sympathy, all their own; but the younger was the protector.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I have known when he would have walked ten mile afoot to see a good armour."—*Much Ado About Nothing.*

YEARS passed on, and found in their course Ebenezer Emlott to be more and more supreme in Zion Chapel and Lexley Grange, and a despot in both. His subscriptions in support of all the agencies that centred upon the Baptist meeting-house so increased year by year, that his bitterest and most jealous rivals in that establishment began one by one to withdraw from the conflict, and leave him the alone wielder of its destinies. The chapel could not afford to offend him. Nothing was done, scarce contemplated, apart from him. The whole body of worshippers, as much as the minister, began to discover that they were in bondage; but when the discovery was made, it was, or seemed to be, too late to act upon it. Both Mr. Juggins and his flock groaned under something very like an absolute monarchy.

The manufacturer's power was even greater within the precincts of the Grange than the chapel. Over him who ought to have been the master he had long gained a peculiar control. A listlessness had come over Ralph Lexley; and while in this state the meshes of an influence, that was destined to be troublesome in after days, were thrown around him. Fitfully he would show signs of a desire to recover his position in the household, but when the mood was over it left him but more languidly supine. Only in one place was he superior—that was his mill. There none interfered with him, and none tried—not even the deacon, his abstention being of purpose. There he was the master, capable in business, and himself timely and regular in his work. Nevertheless, any one could see it was not for money he strove, but forgetfulness. This diligence was a pool in which to steep memory in unconsciousness. At the mill he was successful. The moment he had reached home, the energy left him. He made not the slightest assertion of headship —contented if he might sit apart in his own study, and read, or affect to read, the books which one or two of his grandfathers had purchased and laid up in tiers of shelves. They were mostly of a religious nature, and, being of the eighteenth century, unequivocally dry; but he seemed to find pastime and refreshment in them. At the chapel he had become a nonentity.

Whatever influence he might assert was wielded through his brother-in-law. There, however, on occasion another spirit would come over him. He would for a short time take an active and lively interest in Zion's affairs, spiritual and temporal. He would attend the business meetings, and speak with a nervous determination that astonished everybody; and for the moment it would seem as if Ebenezer must vacate his throne. Everybody hoped it might be so. But the spirit would die out as suddenly as it was lit up. He fell back upon his old reserve. For several days after such an outburst he would be confused; he would avoid his brother-in-law if possible, and when it was impossible he would meet him with half advances of apology, and silently deprecate his anger for such an act of self-assertion. Ebenezer at these times would look at Ralph as if he would read him through and through. Such an attempt must have proved unsatisfactory. For the curious and inquisitive expression would remain on his face for days together. Ralph was evidently a mystery to him, and he was irritated that he could not unravel it.

Over his sister Jane, Ebenezer had a power of much longer standing than the other. She had been under his thumb from her infancy; and now that she was married, and had a child of her own growing up, she

was none the less subservient to his tyrannical rule. Obedience to her brother had been inculcated upon her ever since the death of her parents. Such obedience was natural from his superior age ; but it had continued long after the irresponsible years of her childhood had passed away. When the time had arrived for Jane to assert herself, Ebenezer was the one to whom she still referred all her actions. This was in a large measure her brother's doing. He had never permitted her pupilage to cease. From the first, law on his side had been met with compliance on hers that was well-nigh servile—and this law had never been relaxed.

Nevertheless, Jane Emlott had a conscience ; and, strange to say, few had a conscience more sensitive than hers. In her heart, and in the silence of her chamber, she was ever probing within her to know the right and the wrong of things. Many a sleepless night, for instance, had she passed in anxious thought about Johnnie ; and whatever course her judgment dictated to her, she would have carried it out, had not she met her brother, as a rule, the next morning. Then her will gave way to his, and her judgment with it. She had an impression that his wisdom was boundless, and that his sagacity was determined by similar limits. But the real origin of Ebenezer's power she knew not—in reality, it was because her brother represented the chapel. Jane had grown up under

the shadow of the chapel. Her early years had been spent, not in play, like other children, but in the parlour, 'mid deacons and ministers. From her corner she had heard conversation which had biassed her life; the conversation of men who spoke as if under an illumination vouchsafed to none else without those walls; who spoke as if to them was committed the very oracles of truth; who spoke of the world outside as lying under darkness, and as if the only light that shone in such a benighted region was that which streamed forth from the little porch and the narrow windows of Zion Chapel. As a child, she had taken it all in; and after her father was dead, and when Ebenezer had succeeded to his office, she transferred to him this accumulation of associations; and thus he came to her ever as a Moses from the mount, with tablets in his hand. And when he said "Do," she did it. Thus did Ebenezer continue his sway over her better self. The fact perchance she was aware of—the cause she did not know.

In the mean time the boys were growing up. There were three of them now, for an addition to the family was made by the death of Mrs. Sowerby, Jane's sister. Mrs. Lexley had not seen much of her of late, for ten years previously Mr. Sowerby had gone to seek his fortune in London. There he had set up in the haberdashery business, and, being a sharp and

shrewd man in his trade, had accumulated several thousands of pounds. He died of a decline; and his wife, after a twelvemonth, followed him from a like complaint. Then their one child, Ebenezer, called after his uncle, in hopes that he might inherit a part of his wealth—most other people would have called him Ebenezer, too—came to live with his aunt; and he was made heartily welcome. Ben, as he was called, was not amiable, and his reticence was something extraordinary. He used his eyes, but never his tongue. He never volunteered a remark of his own, and replied in a monosyllable if spoken to; but his eye was always sliding from side to side, under cover of a drooping lid. He was thought to be cunning; and certainly his subservience to his uncle was such as must have mightily pleased that same gentleman.

By this time Johnnie was becoming a man—a man in age, at least. Ebenezer's training had not made him any fonder of his uncle, as, out of compliment, we must call him; and if he actually feared and disliked him, the latter sentiment was most thoroughly reciprocated. The manufacturer did not fear him—he had, in fact, a contemptuous feeling for the lad's lack of spirit; but he did dislike him. He had felt this from the first, and with each recurring year he felt it still the more. Nothing irritated him

so much as the reflection that Johnnie was the heir, and not Geoffrey. How often he had wished that Jane had been Ralph Lexley's first wife, and Geoffrey his first child. This, however, was idle; but none the less did he hate Johnnie for being such a baulk to Emlott greatness.

The lads themselves were strangely unlike. Johnnie had become a big fellow, and yet somehow did not seem, old as he was, to have outgrown the awkwardness of tall boyhood. He was, doubtless, too thin, and delicate looking. His hands were very white; so was his forehead. His hair (he had a big head) was still long, and showed an indisposition to lie smoothly and straight. His large grey eyes had the same apprehensive gaze, at times, in them; and, when in his bashful and usual mood, he displayed a most peculiar inability to dispose of his long arms and legs in an easy and composed fashion. Geoffrey used to laugh at him for his ungainliness, and say he looked like one who stood in imminent peril of stumbling over his own legs. Nevertheless, his was a face, and even a form, that would attract most women; and the old sad and yet tender air that sate on his features, the tone of which was given by his thin lips, tended to meet with a response from that sex. The strange part was that all treated him as a boy—yes, long after he had passed his twentieth year. Girls, younger

by many years than himself, made advances to him that would have been deemed abominable conduct by the women-folk if it had been any one else. But no one, not even the mammas of other girls, thought it necessary to say anything severe on the subject; and this although Johnnie was, in right of his heirship, a most eligible *parti*. There were still whisperings that he was rather queer; and in the more sacred privacy of their chambers, mothers of growing girls would ask the fathers of the same, as they impressively tapped their heads, or rather night-caps, if they did not think that there was something wrong in that direction; to which the more cautious father would respond "Perhaps," or "May-be so."

Geoffrey was the most popular—a favourite with every one, young and old. Stoutly built and strong, although not above the average height, he was the best cricketer in the neighbourhood, first with the gloves, and in a handicap race was always set at the starting-post. He had a good clear complexion —somewhat bronzed, 'tis true, by exposure to fair weather and to foul, to sun and storm; but this only added to his good looks. He and Johnnie were utterly opposite in everything—looks and habits and disposition; nevertheless, they were all but inseparable. In this neither Jane nor Ebenezer had had their own way. If it had rested on Johnnie he would

have given way and foregone the closeness of their intimacy, though it would have broken his heart; but Geoffrey had no intention of any such rupture of their friendship—and he had his way. Many a whipping had been inflicted on him by Ebenezer, and many an anxious reprimand by his mother; but his skin was tough and his heart was true, and as he grew up, the years found Geoffrey but the more determined to hold by Johnnie. Nearly seven years younger he was, and still he ruled his half-brother—ruled him in a careless, jovial, rollicking kind of fashion—but, nevertheless, ruled him. Here he had a certain similarity to his uncle. He would laugh at Johnnie's queer ways, his love of stillness, his gentle, meditative moods; but he laughed as those laugh who love. Wherever Geoffrey went he took Johnnie with him; and oh, how Johnnie liked it! But nothing pleased them so much as to go to the cricket-ground—one to play, the other to muse. It was beside the church. One or two of the old limes hung over into the very meadow where they carried on their play; and oftentimes, as the match went on, Johnnie would clamber over the little fence and sit upon a mouldy gravestone and gaze on the old church, and wonder how long it had been built, and who built it. Of course he knew that "Godfrey de Grewbye" had built it; but what was he like? and had he been a Crusader? and

was the church exactly the same, saving for the decays and the dilapidations of time? Then, too, at such times, if the door was unlocked, he would enter into the church, and peer down the aisle. Years had passed before he had entered that porch a second time, and now that he did so there was still a quaking and a dread lest his uncle should be secreted behind one of the pillars, or round the corner of some high and old-fashioned pew, and should pounce out upon him, and drag him home with that awful silence he remembered so well. This feeling especially came on him as he looked at the big knight and the little alabaster child. Often he did not dare to go near at all, and would gaze wistfully at them from a far distance; but near or far as he took his stand, he still fancied in the old way that the little girl looked straight at him, and smiled with a sweet smile of pity.

One day, as he was thus gazing at the effigy, he saw some one coming towards him from the chancel. It was a face he knew; he had seen the owner several times in the yard copying epitaphs, as it appeared to him.

"Evening, sir. You seem fond o' that 'ere spot?"

"I do like it very much," said Johnnie, timidly.

"Them Grewbys is an old family, there's no doubt about that. That one as is represented there was the greatest o' that name, though."

"Who was he?" said Johnnie.

"Sir Thomas. He died at Shrewsbury, fighting for th' House o' Lancaster, in the reign of Henry the Fourth, i' 1403, I think; but he'd fought in many a battle before that, both in England and i' France."

"Is that his daughter?" asked the youth.

"Yes. She died th' same day, at th' same hour, and some do say at th' same second, though she was a hundred miles away; in fact, she was at Grewby Manor. That was strange, now, warn't it?"

"The most extraordinary thing I ever heard," said Johnnie. "Is it quite true?"

"Well, they say so," said the stranger.

"Oh, I've no doubt it's true. It must be true, mustn't it?—but it's very strange."

"What's that you're looking at?" said the other, seeing him suddenly change colour, and look towards the door.

"You didn't see some one bending under the pew there, did you?" he said quickly, trying with difficulty not to catch his breath.

"No. Why should they be bending; they needn't be feared o' us, need they?"

"No, not of us; to be sure, they could not be afraid of us," said Johnnie nervously.

"And we've nowt to be feared o' them," added the other, laughing. "So I see no use o' you bending

neither;" for Johnnie had slouched himself down in his fright.

"No, of course not. I—I've no doubt it's all right. Why, how silly I am; it's my hat on the pew-door at the corner!" He was much relieved. "What does this mean—'C. G., 1403'?"

"The C's for Catherine, I suppose, and the G's for Grewby, and the date's for the time o' her decease."

"Catherine Grewby. What a nice name!"

"With a nice face at th' end on it, too," said the other, looking at the effigy.

"Isn't it? I'm so glad you think so," put in Johnnie eagerly.

"But the knight is the best for showing off i' marble. Armour allus looks well in a monument."

"Yes, it's very fine," assented Johnnie. "I wonder if people are as handsome now as they were then?"

"Well, it's a question, of course. But they say 'Handsome is as handsome does;' and if that's to be the cri-terion, judging by the queer games as most on 'em played, I should say as they was a rayther plain lot."

"But the kings, and nobles, and ladies?" objected Johnnie, who had indulged in sundry golden dreams of tournaments where lords surrendered life with the utmost complaisance, out of mere compliment to some dark-eyed beauty who was looking on.

"Of course, of course it's all a question. I'm as loyal as most men, and I've a great respect for th' quality; but in spite of their good living, and fine dress, and steel trappings, if we are to stick to th' cri-terion, I should make bold to guess as they, women-folk included, were th' plainest-looking of the whole ruck."

"Dear me," said Johnnie, whose ideas were being wholly upturned. "I should like to have seen them dressed, though. How grand and brave that knight looks!"

"Ay, it's fine. I've got one o' them steel gorgets at home. That stone one is uncommon like it."

"You've got a—what did you say, sir?"

"One o' them gorgets. I've more nor that, though; for I've a clean rig-out o' plated armour," said the stranger, with some pride. "A pointed helmet, a coat o' mail, o' ringed steel, a——"

"Oh, but have you, really? Is this a—what's this?" said Johnnie eagerly, pointing to the knight's helmet.

"Oh, that's a head-piece, called a casque; but they've lots o' names for it—such like as 'morion,' or 'brasset,' or 'helmet.' That's what they call the vizard; they breathed through them perforated holes."

"Dear me, did they indeed?" said Johnnie, all eyes for the visor. "And what's this?"

"That's a habergeon. You wouldn't like to wear a shirt o' that material, I warrant you. Eh, but they carried some weight i' those days, did them soldiers. Look at those interwoven rings. Would you like to see a real one?"

"You don't mean to say you've seen a real habergeon?" put in Johnnie, hot and flushed with excitement.

"Seen one! I've got one of my own, bought it at a sale at Chadstow four year ago come Michaelmas; it cost me a pretty penny, though. If you'd really like to see it, I'll call some afternoon atween five and six. I'll be fain glad to show it you. You seem summut o' my sort, if you'll excuse me; you like a bit of th' antique. I've got some nice brasses—monumental brasses, you know—rubbed o' paper. Did you ever take an impression o' that figure on the pavement by the west door?"

"Take an impression!—rubbed on paper! I don't know even what you mean," responded Johnnie, with a look of the profoundest admiration at his new-found friend. "How clever he must be to know all about these knights, and effigies, and pieces of armour! And now he was talking quite calmly of taking impressions from these ancient engravings on the floor."

"When you come to see me, I'll show you the

process, and some o' my copies. I've a portfolio of them. I took 'em all myself out o' Bramston yard, and Glapton Priory, and Garsington Abbey."

"When shall I come?" said Johnnie, who would have liked to have rushed off there and then to the stranger's house. "What a wonderful place it must be!" he thought. "How happy the man must be to have such things! How did he manage to talk so quietly about them?"

"Let me see. Saturday afternoon would suit me best; say about four."

"Geoffrey plays against Bramston club on the ground here. I'll come, thank you. But where do you live? And if you would be so kind as to tell me your name," said Johnnie, hesitatingly.

"My name's Isaac Curling, and I live at the corner of Elder Street. You know Elder Street?"

"Yes, yes, I know. Why, you're the clerk. Oh yes, I will come. If I go over that field, and cross the turnpike, I can get in two minutes from the cricket-ground, can't I?"

"Ay, you could, I dare say; it would take me six or seven, but my life is no' so young as yourn."

The clerk turned away towards the river, and Johnnie, after a look at the knight and the child, went towards the cricket-ground; but it was easy to be seen, from his flushed face and smile, that he had

been made very happy by something; and when Geoffrey was told, it was agreed that it would be quite safe for Johnnie to steal from the ground, and return there without observation.

This was not the only visit Johnnie paid the clerk. Several times he left Geoffrey, and stole to the cottage which was filled with so many curious objects. How he revelled among those ancient pieces of armour; how he gazed on those two pikes set up on either side the door, with the corselet above hanging from the wall; how earnestly he set himself to learn the art of taking impressions from the brasses, questioning Isaac all the time, who was by no means loth to answer, for he liked a good listener on subjects like these!

One evening, as Johnnie left the cottage in Elder Street, he fancied he saw his cousin Ben skulking round the corner. He was not sure, but it made him nervous. He told Geoffrey, when he returned to the cricket-ground, but he laughed and said it was no matter. As they entered the Grange yard, they were met by Ebenezer and Jane; the latter looked sad, the former explosive.

"Ben's told," whispered Johnnie, trembling.

"So you have made friends with that wretched formalist of a clerk, have you?" began Ebenezer, in a quiet, far too quiet, manner. "And you'll be wanting

to sit in the pew again in the chancel, and to go regularly to church, and become a Papist; but it won't do. I've had my eye on you, I'll let you know. You'll ha' to give him up, lad. I'll have no ceremonializing, outside religion in my—in this house, I can tell you. You'll see him no more, take my word for it. You know me by this time—what I says, I means. Get you in," and he gave his nephew a shove towards the kitchen door.

"Stop there, Johnnie," suddenly said Geoffrey, with a stern but determined air. "Uncle, where's Ben?"

"Ben," said Ebenezer; "what do you want with Ben?" But just then Geoffrey saw him lurking by the scullery window. Seeing he was detected he came out with a sly leer, and walked coolly towards them.

Without a moment's hesitation Geoffrey rolled up his sleeves—he had no coat on—he often walked from the cricket-ground so—and seized Ben by the shoulders. They were of a height, but Geoffrey was the more powerfully built. "Now, Ben, as we say at cricket, fair play. Did you or did you not tell uncle that you saw Johnnie at Isaac Curling's? If you say 'No,' I'll ask your pardon, and let you go; if you say 'Yes,' you'll find that sneaks don't go unpunished —always," he added.

Ben hung his head, but said nothing.

"Did you or did you not?" quietly asked his brother.

Ben looked at Ebenezer and then at his aunt. Both stood in amazement at the scene.

"You need not answer—I know it." Coolly he lifted up Ben and walked with him to the duck-pond, some ten yards off; and before any one could stop him, he tilted him up, and soused his head and shoulders in the filthiest part. Ben came up with many splutterings, his hair covered with a mixture of mud, carrot, and cabbage. He looked decidedly grotesque. "That's the way a cowardly sneak is treated, when detected," said Geoffrey quietly, as he let him down.

Both Jane and Ebenezer had rushed up, but it was too late to save Ben from his ducking. Evidently he was not a favourite, for the kitchen-maid and cook looked on from the scullery window with unmistakable delight.

"What did you do that for?" said Ebenezer, in a rage.

"Because he skulked round Elder Cottage, and then came at once and told you that he had seen Johnnie there. He's a sneak!"

"Quite right—he did his duty—and I'm going to punish Johnnie for it."

"But you've no authority to punish him—it is for father to decide."

"Father!" said the deacon, with a sneer of contempt.

"Yes, father," quietly repeated Geoffrey. "If Johnnie is to be punished, father may do it, but you shall not. Your sneer I leave to mother to resent—it would be disrespectful to notice it till she has had her say on the subject." He looked bravely at her.

"Ebenezer, Geoffrey's right—I will not have their father depreciated in their eyes, and before me, too." She seemed to have taken an inspiration from Geoffrey. She looked sternly at her brother.

Ebenezer Emlott stared at them all with a gaze of mingled passion and amazement. He had never met with such a rebuff in his life before. For once he had met with a complete repulse. He turned to the house with an expression of baffled rage.

Three more years passed away, and we come to the time when our story actually begins. I trust the reader has not been wearied by this long retrospect. It was necessary.

CHAPTER IX.

"I have a secret to reveal."

1 *Henry VI.*

CHURCH-GOERS in Lackington had to take a somewhat circuitous route when they had reached that part of the High Street which overlooked the churchyard. The steep incline was avoided by a semicircular pathway which led the worshipper by easy descents to the gate. A foot-bridge spanned the shallow, but then sparkling, stream, the Scudd. There is no foot-bridge now, and even the stepping-stones lower down have become disused, if they have not disappeared, for there is a wide gap in the centre, across which few but a growing schoolboy would care to leap. The surface of those that remain, too, is frayed with the action of the water rather than with the foot of the wayfarer, and small but distinct patches of mossy mould mark disuse. Several of the stones also are a couple of feet, at least, nearer the sea, for

sometimes the Scudd rises suddenly, and has great velocity and power.

About four o'clock one afternoon there might have been seen a man crossing these said stones—neither trippingly, as the children did; nor cautiously, as the old and infirm; nor yet calculatively, as the middle-aged. He had a way all his own of crossing these boulders. Four times a day for many a long year had he gone or come this way, and it would be strange if he had not fallen upon a method by this time. He knew every stone—each was to him as a familiar friend. And as one on such terms he knew the weaknesses and the foibles of all. One stone jolted; here, by a decisive tread on the left side, he found the centre of gravity. Another was slippery; he knew to the width of a peppercorn the precise spot where it was least so. To reach a third, there was a slight chasm; but never had he missed his footing but once, and that was twenty years ago. As one, too, on such terms as I have stated, he would sometimes find himself talking to the stones. At any rate, upon his daily journeyings to and fro, from the church to his home at the corner of Elder Street, and from his home at the corner of Elder Street to the church, Isaac Curling always began his meditations aloud at this point.

"Over twenty-nine thousand times—eh, but that's a deal!" He looked from the stone into the water,

as if he were seeking some particular troutlet dodging round an abutment of rock to benefit by the information. "Let me see—I think there's no mistake—four times seven is twenty-eight, fifty-two times twenty-eight is fourteen hunnerd and fifty-six, and that multiplied by twenty comes to over twenty-nine thousand. If I takes off a few for days as I've bin ill, or from home, and adds th' times as I went afore I were clerk, it 'll be thirty thousand, I'll be bound. Ay, thirty thousand," he said, looking gravely at the stone he was coming to, as though to disclaim its astonishment at his remarkable powers of summing. "I've done that bit o' arithmetic many a hunnerd times, and you've yerd me, too, an't you?"

Isaac Curling, or Ike, as his associates, as well as they who were not, styled him, said no more. He had cleared the stones, and the ascent was a steep one, and people do not speak much going up-hill, even if they have a friend with them. However, if steep it was not high; and with one rest half-way to recover his breath—it was the customary spot—he soon emerged upon the road above. He did not take the High Street, but struck across into the meadows, filled with buttercups and cowslips. Here was a rural path with turnstiles. This was a short cut to his part of the town. He was soon in Elder Street; and as the corner where his house was situated was that

nearest the church, he came almost at once upon the door.

Ere Isaac entered he paused for a moment, and looked up. It was his usual wont, and his life had been wholly one of routine. Above the door and along the wall was a wreath of bright and gilt letters. Each letter was of different type and character, all being illuminated in a manner we should say hitherto unknown in Lackington. The legend ran thus: "Mr. Isaac Curling, late Parish Clerk, Professor of Genealogy. Pèdigrees carefully collated, and lost Heirs discovered—on the shortest notice." These words, I say, ran across the whole front of the house, performing a little somersault in the centre to meet the requirements of the porch. This was Isaac's triumph of antiquarian art. He had had it done to order. His own fingers had traced the plans. All had been executed under his immediate supervision. It was not merely the letters that tickled his eye—the words were even more delectable to him. They were big words—they were portentous words. He knew they would bring him reverence from his less enlightened neighbours. And they did. They had not been there six months—for it was only six months since he had retired from the clerkship—nevertheless, there had been a perceptible awe of the great man after this.

"Looks well—don't it, now? And though I's clerk no more, I visits the registers as I will; for Gregory knows as I can help him. And I's never missed morning nor arternoon prayers but once, and that was th' morning 'P' in 'Pedigrees' came off—drat un!"

Another glance upward, and Isaac went in. It was a large and rambling room, pleasant from its irregularity. Several faded portraits, in huge gilded frames, hung on one side, the faces and shirt-frills alone standing out from the dark and dingy canvas. Some ancient crockery adorned the chimney-piece. The floor was of polished oak, and uncarpeted. Four chairs of the same wood, but variously carved, and of different stain, flanked the opposite wall, with backs as high and stiff as those of the stayed (more stayed than staid, I fear) and starched ladies who first sat in them. Their legs, too, *i. e.* the chairs', were thick, rounded, or bandy, according to the taste of their day and generation. One side of the room was wainscoted; on it were tacked various family trees. One in the centre represented the Curlings, the earliest being a certain "Robert Cœur de Leon." Later on, the name appeared as "Querdlyng," then "Curdling;" and "Isaac Curling, only son and heir, bachelor," bolstered up the whole. On the right of this was the "Grewby tree," on the left the "Lexley." A cabinet in one corner,

with drawers, writing-desk, ink—black and red, paper, and goosequills, gave a studious aspect to the apartment.

The room was unmistakably attractive. And as some ladies will with a bright and richly-coloured robe cover a large amount of shabby and even tattered underdress, so Isaac Curling had spent his savings upon this one chamber to the neglect of all others. On a winter's eve, when his red curtains were drawn, and the fire was well alight, and his oil lamp burned brightly on its stand by the chimney-corner, this man Isaac was one to be envied. Many a man in better circumstances, and more learned than he, might well have coveted him this possession.

What was the state, or what were the contents, of his two inner chambers few knew, and none less than Isaac himself. He always sat up late, poring over his papers; and as often as not he went to bed in the dark. This room was all he cared for—his pride, the scene of his dreams and projects—his world. Dust might accumulate in other rooms, but not here. One of his daily duties was to take a cloth and rub and polish everything. Not one article escaped his hand. But of all else he was oblivious.

The owner of this singularly studious apartment, so out of character in its size and contents with the general aspect of the exterior, which was like all

other cottages around, went straight to the cabinet, and out of his pocket he drew an old-fashioned key and unlocked one of the large drawers, and extracted therefrom a cumbrous ledger, greasy with use and yellow by age. As he turned it slowly, page by page, you might see to what various purpose he had put it.

Here was in capital letters, "The Scrimps, of Garforth Hall, compiled from Barnham Church Registry." The next page displayed a rough outline of a tombstone, above which stood two angels with folded wings in a protective attitude. Below was inscribed, "Johannes Skillicorne, 1725." Further on he gazed with quiet satisfaction on some closely-written matter, headed, "The Claimants to the Parfield Estate." But he was not looking for these. It simply pleased his eye to light momentarily over these proofs of industry, just as a painter in a gallery of art will be looking askance at his own picture, whatever part he may be in. At last he came to the page he was looking for; and he took a quill, dipped it into the ink, and began to copy down methodically his gleanings of to-day. It was not much; but he wrote with laboured accuracy. At last he had finished, and was in the act of committing the book to its resting-place, when a hurried knock roused him; and, before he could speak, the door was opened, and a head was protruded.

"Ike, Ike—I mean Mr. Curling——"

"'Ike,' to me! Did you, as you entered this house, read the inscription over it?"

"Oh, I didn't mean to do it, Ike—sir. Please, Mr. Banyer's dying, and wants you at onc't, please."

"Banyer dying, and wants me? Why, I thought he was better," put in Isaac, somewhat startled.

"So they did think, sir, but he took a bad turn in the night; and Mr. Laycock, as is the doctor at Bramston, has been sent for, and he says as how he can't last out from two to three hours."

"And he sent for me? Did he send himself? Is he conscious?"

"I can't be sure about that. Mother was in, a helping of Mrs. Banyer, when the doctor came, and I was playing with Sally in the lane; and she com'd quite quick-like afore I knew, and took me by the scruff o' th' neck, and said, 'Go as if you were running for bare life, and tell Ike'—she said Ike, sir," put in quickly the girl, seeing Isaac's eye fixed on her.

"Ay, ill-mannered parents breed insolent children! Go on, wench."

"'Go and tell Ike'—that's you, Mr. Curling, you know—'to come at once. Say Mr. Banyer's dying, and has summit 'ticular to tell him.'"

Something particular to be imparted to Isaac was thoroughly acceptable to that individual. He looked

important, and forgot the trivial indignities of the child.

"Did he wish to speak to me alone?"

"Mother says 'summit 'ticular to tell him.' I didn't yer no more nor that."

"Well, I was at my books, you see; but in a matter o' life and death, I suppose even they must give way," replied he, as if calculating how much the world would lose by this interruption. "Run you back again, and say that Mr. Curling will leave his studies, and come wi' all possible alacrity."

The child went, after a brief gaze at the chamber which was such a mystery to the younger population around. Few children had been in that room, and the few who had were not anxious to renew their associations. Isaac had not made them welcome.

Sharpened by his curiosity, the genealogist was quicker than was his wont, and not very long after the girl's return was himself at the door. There was no one in the kitchen below, so he made his way upstairs with a gravity becoming one who trod the house of death, and also one who was to be the recipient of dying requests—perhaps dying secrets. There was no telling. Even sedate Mr. Banyer might have his secrets. He had been head-stable man to the Grewbys for twenty-five years, and longer than that about the house. Could he know any-

thing relating to the family which it was worth while to impart? or did he simply want him to act in some capacity for Mrs. Banyer's interests after his death? Well, a trusteeship was more or less in his way; it would give him an opportunity of learning the law in some little matters of detail about which he wished to acquire information. It would be unneighbourly to refuse. Yes, he would accept the trust. Arrived at this charitable determination he gravely, and without knocking, walked in; for the door was only half closed.

"Is that Isaac Curling?" whispered a feeble voice from the bed.

"Yea, lad."

Mr. Curling and Mr. Banyer had not been very intimate, each rather despising the other on the same grounds—their occupations in life.

"Dinna you disturb your mind at such a moment as this with domestic anxieties," he continued, bending down to the pale and haggard face of the stableman. "I'll act, and to th' best of my ability; act as is best for you and yourn."

"Act—act! What do you mean?" eagerly questioned the other.

"As trustee, or in such other capacity as——"

"I didn't send you for that," broke in the invalid. "Thomas Williams is to look after all that. No;

I've sent you, sir, for another purpose. You're a kind of jinny—jinny—something or other. My memory's gone," he added, not caring even in that moment to confess his lack of familiarity with such a big word.

"Genealogist, I presume you means," said Isaac, with a little loftiness.

"Ay, that's it; I couldn't recall it just at the moment. But there's something else besides ginnialo—— Ah, my poor memory—how it's gone! What's that over your door? I know I've seen some writing there, unless it's gone. I saw it one day as I was going to Cartlege's, the dog-doctor, for Dick Sykes' bull-pup, as was bad wi' the—— Ah, my poor memory, there it is again," he added; for the disease which the doctor had ascribed to the animal had always stuck in his throat, and his memory was as good a means of escaping the difficulty as another.

"Professor of Genealogy. Pedigrees carefully collated. Lost Heirs discovered—on the shortest——"

"Ay, that's it," broke in the dying man. "Lost heirs discovered. What do you mean by that?" He said this cautiously.

"Well, to those as understands these intricate subjects it is plain enough. Suppose as how there was a family as was holding property to which they had no right—no legal right, you know," he added, as if he were using the very alphabet of his profession in

charity to the other's ignorance. "How could they have no right—no legal right, you ask? Because somebody else had the right, who was not in possession—actual possession. You comprehend me?" he said, with suave condescension.

"Oh yes; that's, of coorse, plain as a nut, I should say."

The genealogist was somewhat disconcerted.

"Ah, you comprehend me. I'm glad o' that. I've allus maintained that if th' law were only stripped of its vague and mystifying phrascology, and rendered i' simple, I may say, terse English, that it could be made clear to the dullest comprehension."

"That's me, I suppose?" said the sick man, grimly.

"No, not you—not you, by any means," said Isaac, bethinking him that this was not the way to arrive at the secret, if there was one, which, judging from the turn of the conversation, already seemed likely.

"Looked uncommon like it. Well, go on."

"I will proceed. It might happen that this said person who had th' right—th' legal right, that is—did not know of the fact. Certain circumstances attending his birth might ha' robbed him of this knowledge. On the other hand, it is possible that some third person, not immediately concerned, may

have obtained, accidently or the reverse, some thread or clue to th' real state of th' case. You see with me so far, I presume?"

"Can I see a dog's tail six inches afore my nose?"

"Hem! I am successful. I am satisfied. It is not given to every man, b'lieve me, to render intelligible to the—let us say average mind, the ambiguities o' legal detail. We'll go on."

"Ay, that's reet. Th' third party had got scent on't. You'd gotten that fur."

"We will proceed, I say. The third party—to use your homely, and yet I am bound to say accurate, simile—is on th' trail. It is by the judicious and yet persistent following up——"

"Ay, Jerry wur the dog for that. Jerry wur th' best dog in th' yard." The dying stableman spoke more feebly.

Isaac saw it. He must be quick. "Well, what would you know more?"

"I know a lost heir," said Banyer quietly.

The other was startled; and so was Mrs. Banyer, who had been sitting by with her apron to her face, sobbing low—for, on the whole, Banyer had been a good husband to her. He had not always kept from the drink—that was his worst fault. At such times he had knocked her about a little; but if she showed a

black eye he put it down to the drink, and so did she, poor patient soul, and thus they got on well for a time.

"You know a lost heir? You astonish me," said Isaac.

"Ay, that I do, and no mistake about it either. I'm *a third party*, I am. And I thowt to ha' kept it to missel' till I could make sure on it, and make summut out o' it, for Catharine here; but it's too late now—too late."

"Perhaps one who's had some knowledge o' these things could. But you sent for me, Mr. Banyer. I see it all. You wish me to fulfil your incompleted task."

"I do," said Jim, firmly. "I don't know much about you, but it seems this kind o' thing is i' your line—part o' your trade, as I may say; an' for her sake, and for right's sake, I'll tell you." But unfortunately, Jim could not tell them; he was too exhausted. He fell back, and seemed suddenly oblivious to their presence.

"Why, he's dying, and we don't know nothing about it!" ejaculated Isaac. "Some brandy, quick!"

There was a bottle at hand, and, with Mrs. Banyer's aid, some drops were got between his lips. He momentarily revived.

"The name of the family—what is it?"

"What family?" murmured Jim.

"That's in wrongful possession."

"It's gone. My memory's all gone."

"Are they in these parts? Do they live in this neighbourhood?"

"Yes, yes."

"And the heir—who is he?"

"She—it's Cath-ar-ine." He could not get on. He looked confused, and stopped.

"And the name of the family. Is it Bannister, or Lexley, or Grewby?"

No response—nor ever would be in this world. Jim was dead.

"Mrs. Banyer, this is not the time for me to refer to this as we have heard. I will come again after the funeral. Meanwhile keep the secret; let it out to no one. I will do my best to see that, if you have a claim to any property i' this neighbourhood, as Jim suspected, you shall get your rights."

"He was allus saying he knew summut as would set me up in silk dresses for the rest o' my days," sobbed out Catharine. "But oh, what's that to this? He's dead—the best o' husbands! Never had a wife a better nor a kinder husband, 'cept he wur i' drink; and then, to be sure, he knew no better."

What noble martyrs are thousands of these women, in their patient endurance of ill while the

despot lives, and in their forgetfulness of the ill after he is dead! How few of these men are worthy such companionship here! and who can hope for it hereafter?

CHAPTER X.

"If he, compact of jars, grow musical,
We shall have shortly discord in the spheres."
As You Like It.

WHEN Mrs. Bland gave an evening party, it meant a large amount of careful preparation, whether personal or domestic. Still, as she and her daughter Maria reclined in a double circle of flounces upon the sofa, awaiting the first ring of the bell, you might see from the placid expression of content on the face of the former, that she felt that nothing had been overlooked or forgotten—they were ready. She was pleased, too, with Maria's appearance. So was Maria, which bade well for the success of the evening; for Maria could be very awkward if she liked. When in this frame, no one could be more agreeable than Miss Bland. She gave smiles to every one—to her inferiors with a lavish bounty, like a lady doling out gingernuts to the charity children—to her friends with a depth of meaning which meant to imply how fond of

them, individually, she was, and how pleasant in general it was for them to meet together under such happy auspices.

Not that in this matter of smiling Maria made no mistakes. She had good teeth—some bought—and she knew it—knew they were good teeth, I mean. Now, to smile, and thereby show a good set of teeth, is one thing—to smile in order to show them, is another. The most careless observer can mark this distinction. Maria always, or nearly always, did the latter. As a result her smile rarely stirred the surface of that little well of genial affection in our bosoms which is always ready to be moved by the advances of a sympathetic spirit. Besides, Maria sometimes overdid it. In her moments of absolute *abandon*, she would smile with such a girlish glee that she displayed the golden rim which marked their setting. Maria, on the strength of a somewhat tawny skin, used to boast that she was of *foreign extraction*. There was no doubt at such moments about her teeth.

Of course, the world is ill-natured. If some dared to say she was heavenly-minded, there were a dozen others ready at once to suggest that she had only to be obedient to the customary axiom to "Follow your nose," to find herself instantly in that celestial region. Her nose—there is no gainsaying it—did point up-

ward. The needle is not truer to the north than was Maria's nose to the serene and exalted heights whither her thoughts were supposed to have fled. Like the needle, too, Maria's nose proved beyond demonstration the Euclidian truth, that the extremities of lines are points. It has been hinted by some of these before-mentioned ill-natured people, that the termination of her nose was invisible—it was lost in its own attenuation; but this, of course, was to make too fine a point of it. I merely allude to it, and pass on.

Maria Bland was rather short, and somewhat stout. She had dark eyes and hair, with a large quantity of both—that is, she was always making eyes, and her hair flowed down and over her shoulders in a copious shower of ringlets. She was the exact counterpart of her mother. Mrs. Bland was tall, had smooth hair, a thin, weasel-like waist, and a well-determined mouth. But, as with Maria, her nose was the striking feature. Till you had taken in the nose (not that it ever was or could have been taken in), you could not have observed these other details I have mentioned. To quote one of our later poets, it was "terribly arched;" indeed, it fairly rivalled the beak of an eagle. It is generally believed—indeed, it is well known, from a hint she dropped to a lady, which was on no account to be repeated—that

she owed her husband to it. It seems, so ran the gossip, that in the great rage that followed the battle of Waterloo, for Wellington boots and Wellington noses, she had met at an hotel in Bath an officer of the yeomanry, that had not yet seen service, in an enormous pair of Wellingtons. They danced at the assembly together, and before two days were over the nose and the boots had made a match of it. Such is the power of assimilation.

"You have the music all ready, Maria, dear?" inquired Mrs. Bland. She knew it was; but it was pleasant to receive an affirmative reply.

"Yes, mamma; with the 'Guy Fawkes mazurka' on the top. Geoffrey—I mean Mr. Geoffrey Lexley—liked it, you remember?"

"Yes; and so did Johnnie," replied her mother, with a slight impressiveness of tone.

"No, I don't think he did; but he's so queer. I don't think he cares for anything else but those short organ pieces that Miss Marnott plays from Handel, or that air from Beethoven, that I think so stupid."

"Maria, do not forget that I esteem Mr. John Lexley most highly."

"He's the heir, too," put in Maria—quite accidentally, you would have imagined from her tone.

"He is the heir, too, as you say; and in a neighbourhood like that of Lackington, surrounded with

old families, he must be respected as such. The Lexleys are of the most ancient standing in this part of the county. And though they have somewhat sunk themselves in the estimation of many by that unfortunate mill business, still every one knows that it has been a successful undertaking. They are very rich."

"Yes, mamma," said Maria demurely.

"Yes, Maria. I trust that 'Yes' means that you will not be led away by any mere personal attractions to behave with disrespect to Mr. John Lexley. Geoffrey is better-looking; but what are looks?"

"Oh, nothing, of course," said Maria, simpering, and looking at herself in the mirror opposite.

"Looks are fleeting—character is enduring."

"And money?" said her daughter, interrogatively.

"You should not catch me up in that manner, Maria; it's very rude. Money is the root of all evil, unless it is placed in careful hands. I am sure I have ever striven to make you judicious in the expenditure of such little sums as I have been able to give you."

There was no mistaking this; and Maria, if she did not know before, knew now what was expected of her. She was quite willing to bring about the *dénouement* wished for by her mother, provided she might indulge in a little general flirtation between the acts.

Nay, in her own heart's depths, she was determined to marry Johnnie Lexley, and none else. How easy it would be to rule him, and how nice to have plenty of money to spend, and to be respected as head of one of the county families!

"By-the-by, I suppose Miss Marnott will not come down to-night?" asked Maria.

"Bless me, I'd quite forgot her. I'm afraid she must," responded Mrs. Bland, who had her own reasons also for not desiring her presence among the guests. People will talk if she is kept upstairs. Ring the bell, love."

Her daughter obeyed, and the servant was ordered to tell Miss Marnott that Mrs. Bland would expect her to come down in the course of the evening. There was no need for her to hurry, she added.

At this moment the front-door bell announced the first arrival. Mrs. Bland and Maria fell back into their former position, in a perfect pool of flounces. It was a favourite method of the former to be talking in the most casual of manners when the drawing-room door was being opened.

"Yes, I think the fuchsias are beautiful; this is just the season for—oh, Mrs. Jacobs, how are you? I am so glad you were able to come. I trust your rheumatism is better."

Whether Mrs. Jacobs had ever had the rheuma-

tism, or whether it was better, no one could say; for here Mrs. Bland darted forward and all but devoured a young lady in pink gauze, who was no less than Mrs. Jacob's daughter, her mother being clad in a deep sky-blue satin. Having handed her on to Maria, who at once led her to the window recess, they began an earnest colloquy, of which it was to be supposed the evening itself and its coming triumphs was the subject. Evidently, the gentlemen were to have a perilous time of it.

The arrivals came now very fast, and soon the majority of the guests were assembled.

There were the two Lexleys, Johnnie and Geoffrey —and Ben; Ebenezer Emlott, Mr. Juggins and Mrs. Juggins; Mrs. Jacobs and her daughter; Mrs. Bland, besides Maria, and two younger children, a boy and a girl; Dr. Garfitt, wife, son, and daughter; and Mr. Skillicorne, the attorney, with his niece. Several others we need not mention, as of a less social status —people invited to complete the number, or, as spectators, to tell Mrs. Bland afterwards how well it went off.

"Still pale, Mr. John. Why will you and your brothers go so early to the mill? If I were your mother I should forbid it. It cannot be good for you. Of course, it is very praiseworthy; and regularity in business is—at least, so I'm told—of the utmost import-

ance to success; but we all know at Lackington that" —this was said with an air of delightful confidence— "success to you Lexleys is of secondary consequence. People with large estates do not build mills just for success alone. It was so kind of your dear father to give a push to the trade here, when his motive might be so easily mistaken—such a noble example; or was it your grandfather?"

"It was my grandfather, Mrs. Bland—and——"

"Yes, I thought so; of course. How stupid of me not to recollect that I had been told so! What a wonderful man he must have been—so determined in character! He it was who, with such a conscientious sense of duty, took a pew at the chapel, I think?"

"Yes; Mr. Bradford's views did not quite fall in with his own."

"Ah, no. It is so difficult, Mr. John, to find the exact teaching we require. When I came to Lackington, six months ago, tempted by this cottage, my first thought was, 'What shall I be called upon to hear? who can I sit under?' I went to the parish church, but, Mr. John, it did not suit me. There was a hollowness in the service, and a want of nourishment in the sermon—nothing to strengthen, you know. Then I went to the chapel, and really I was charmed. Mr. Juggins is such a simple, charming, devoted old man."

"I am glad you like Mr. Juggins. But you go to Mr. Haddock's church, I think?"

"Well, yes. He is a struggling man, you know, and is placed in a poor parish under many difficulties. He is not a clever man, but he is sound. And, indeed, I feel so sorry for him, with his five small children, that I have felt it almost a duty—in fact, I may say, an absolute duty, Mr. John—to take a pew there, and assist him in such various ways as I am able—not much, of course; but still it is pleasant to feel that if there is self-sacrifice, there is also something done. You know that I have taken his niece as Reginald's governess?"

"Yes, I had heard so. Indeed, I never had the pleasure of meeting Miss Marnott till I saw her here, some weeks ago," said Johnnie, slightly blushing. "I think she has not been long in the neighbourhood?"

"No. Mr. Haddock first mentioned her to me. She has been in one of the cheaper training schools for many years, and after her education was completed, stayed on, at the principal's request, as a kind of under-teacher. But her health began to give way under constant and confined attention to her duties, and so Mr. Haddock determined to remove her."

"She is an orphan, then, I presume?"

"Oh, I forgot to say that she cannot even remember her parents. Her mother was Mr. Haddock's

sister. It was quite evident that Mr. Haddock, dear good man, wanted her at home, but could not afford to keep her; so I suggested—it was one of those little acts, Mr. John, that one Christian can show to another—I suggested that she might live with him, and come here for the day as governess to Reggie and Clara, returning home to help her aunt in the evenings." Mrs. Bland did not mention the miserable pittance offered for salary: probably it did not occur to her to do so.

"Then I suppose she will not be here this evening?" said Johnnie, with a perceptible shade of disappointment, which Mrs. Bland noticed.

"Yes. She had to stay last night and to-night to help me in some little preparations for your entertainment this evening—for which I hope you will be grateful," she said, laughingly—"and I expect her down shortly. She is a nice girl, Mr. John."

"I should think so," said John, gravely.

"Yes, she is a nice girl—not quite formed yet; wants a little more experience; has not, in fact, seen much of society. Rather apt to—but she is not a forward girl, Mr. John."

"I am sure she is not," said Johnnie.

"You are right, quite right; she is not a forward girl. A little too ready, perhaps, to anticipate—that is, to meet the advances of strangers. An ill-natured

person would say she was inclined to take advantage of the position she is in, to cultivate a higher class of acquaintance than it will be her lot to enjoy after she has left me; but we must make allowances, you know, Mr. John. Her future cannot be expected to be a bright one, and so I say to myself, when duty would suggest a little mild reproof, or judicious correction, 'Poor thing, let her be happy while she may.'"

"I am sorry Miss Marnott's prospects are so dismal."

"Yes, it is sad, no doubt. But, after all, Mr. John, I find that class of person do not feel these things as we should feel them. A wise Providence has so ordered it that they are less sensitive—less sensitive to—you see what I mean?"

Johnnie didn't see, but he didn't say so; and at this point the subject of their remarks entered the room.

Cécile Marnott was a fair girl to look upon, and would have been handsome had she not been so small of stature. Her face was slightly oval; her features regular, saving that her mouth was rather big; and her complexion clear. Her eyes were of a deep grey, and it was from them that her face seemed to catch its charm; indeed, they cast an indefinable beauty over her whole countenance. She was simply dressed; indeed, so simply and neatly withal, that one would

at first have detected a fault in it. It seemed to denote a thorough study of that which best suited her; for at a glance you saw that simplicity became her. She had scarcely a single artificial adornment about her—one only flower in her hair. A single locket, pendent from her neck, represented her jewellery—indeed, she had none else; when she had put it on her jewel-box was empty. She came in so quietly that few observed her, and at once stole to an empty seat by a side-table, and began, with a certain nervousness, to inspect a book of coloured plates. But she was not to be left alone long.

"So your uncle is to have the new church, Miss Marnott? I cannot tell you how pleased I am." This was Mr. Juggins. "I am not a Churchman, myself, but there is no minister in the neighbourhood for whom I entertain a higher respect than your revered relative."

"I am afraid your congratulations are premature, sir," said Miss Marnott; and there was a perceptible sadness in her tone. "I mentioned the rumour to uncle yesterday, and he said he had heard nothing about it himself, and had no doubt it was but a piece of gossip."

"It may be so; but I had it from Mr. Skillicorne. And you must remember, Miss Marnott, that those most interested are often the last to hear the story

of their good fortune. You will not think me of a prying spirit when I say that I know of how much consequence such preferment would be to Mr. Haddock. We are not of the same communion, but we stand on the same ground in one respect—we have both families, and we have to do our best to make both ends meet. It is hard work in these days."

"Oh, I had no idea how hard it was to live, till I came to dear uncle's. And he is so brave and devoted, and so is aunt, and they never murmur. But is it right that some clergymen should have so much, and some so little, and that those who have the little should most need the much?"

"You touch a dangerous topic, Miss Marnott. I should advise you not to ask this question of a Dissenter; he might take advantage of it."

"I am sure you wouldn't," said Cécile, with a winning look of confidence; "though I do not exactly know what you mean."

"Don't inquire, then," said the old man; and he looked kindly on the girl. "Besides, we have troubles of our own, and this question of money is one of them. But I shall be indeed sorry if this rumour should prove to be without foundation."

"Oh, I feel sure it is. I cried for hours last night, it was such a disappointment. When Mrs. Bland told me of it yesterday, and hinted that she had had

something to do with it"—Mr. Juggins ahemmed—"and that she intended to write to the bishop again—I think she said 'again'—on the subject, I felt quite sure he would have it; but when I got home, uncle only laughed gently, and said I was a foolish little child, and thought I had more sense than to believe all that I heard. But I will tell you something, if you will not repeat it. I do believe he was a little hopeful when I told him what Mrs. Bland had said. It was very kind of her, wasn't it?"

"An act of that sort is always pleasurable, even if it be unsuccessful in its results," said the old man, with a slight emphasis. He was not quite sure that Mrs. Bland's influence reached so far as the Episcopal residence at Shutcott; and it was well, as he had vented the gossip, to do his part in not encouraging too high hopes.

The conversation ceased, for Miss Bland had taken her seat at the piano. Not that she intended to play just yet—far from it. She first set her scent-bottle and handkerchief upon the instrument. Then she gathered up her skirt into a graceful coil. Then she stripped her fingers of three rings, setting them beside her scent-bottle and handkerchief. Then—dead silence—she didn't begin. She looked at her flounces, and re-arranged them, threw her ringlets with a pretty toss over her shoulder, and looked into

a mirror. Very dead silence. Suddenly she threw her head back in a frenzy, gave a startled look at the opposite wall, pounced upon the keyboard with her fingers, and began "her piece"—that is, she *murdered* a popular theme. The manner will be familiar to many.

The air, a simple ballad, is first played through that all may know who it is that is being led out to *execution*. The murdering process then begins. There are six variations, *i. e.* varieties or methods of putting the victim out of its misery. All are employed. Every tolerable, and especially every intolerable, musician knows them by heart. We may premise that the "air" is inaudibly resurrectionized after every death during a momentary pause.

(1) The first is the *Cat and Mouse* mode. This is playful. The executant lets the air go, and then runs after it in little triplets. In vain the victim tries to escape—it is brought back again. Again and again this is done, till the final *shake* is given, and all is over.

(2) The second is the *Killing by Lightning* plan. Here the right hand comes from the overcharged clouds above, in repeated and reiterated flashes, striking as it reaches earth each several note of the melody with unerring accuracy—at least, it ought to do. Thunder is occasionally introduced from the

left. This must be done carefully, or the effect is spoiled. The first flash is usually fatal. But the heavens continue to blaze for a considerable time.

(3) The third is the *Slain on the Battle-field* method. Here intermittently may be heard the distant boom of artillery, guns bang-banging at brief, very brief, intervals. The chief merit lies in letting off the guns with the right hand, which comes with a swoop over the left to do so. This done, it must instantly return to other military duties higher up. Death quickly ensues.

(4) The fourth is the *Hindoo Widow's pyre* fashion. Here the tum-tums beat to drown the cries of the immolated, who surely but gradually expires. A stillness as of death comes on, and

(5) The fifth movement follows.—*The Funeral* in accordance with the rites of the Church of England. Death is to be understood as having already taken place. The air is played throughout in the minor key. The deceased is made to play its own funeral dirge. With the aid of the soft pedal kept down the whole time, the body is lowered into the grave, and the Burial Service is read with solemn distinctness by a beneficed clergyman in surplice and bands. In good hands, and with a persistent soft pedal, this is extremely effective. The ladies, and more sentimental gentlemen, are often deeply moved.

(6) A prolonged pause. Woe to the uninitiated young gentleman who cries "Bravo," thinking it is over. A glance annihilates him. The *Clog and Fist* mode commences. Here, by every conceivable and inconceivable means, from before and behind, and without mercy, and with none to interfere, the poor thing is thumped, kicked, teased, toused, pinched, punched, clawed, clutched, cuffed, banged, pummelled, clubbed, cudgelled, twisted, twirled, hacked, harassed, bullied, worried, badgered, and baited, till in excruciating agony it gathers up its remaining strength, gives two distinct yelps, and is no more. Life is extinct. So hopelessly dead is it, that the performer gets up from her stool, and retires to a sofa to recover herself after her bloody work. The company, Christians and all, applaud the cruel sport. The gentlemen gather round her.

"Wonderful *execution!*" cries one, forgetting there have been no less than six of them.

"*Striking* performance," declares another. No one can entertain a doubt on that head. So all are agreed.

Maria looked quietly triumphant.

"Will you not favour us with a little music, Miss Marnott?" asked Geoffrey at this stage.

"I am afraid my music will not be very acceptable after what we have heard," replied Cécile, smiling.

"You see I am still in the schoolroom, as it were, and can't shake off the influence of back-boards. I was only allowed to play a certain class of——" Cécile did not know how to proceed without seeming rude.

"You prefer polkas and mazurkas. So do I," said poor ignorant Gip.

"Oh no. Mrs. Norton had an impression that it was never too early to give her pupils a taste for what she called 'good music,'" said Miss Marnott, laughingly. "She thought that from the very first the art of playing, the mere mechanical art, should be associated with all that was best and truest in music. Thus the taste was beginning to be elevated during the very drudgery of learning the scales. That was Mrs. Norton's view," she added, blushing.

"And that is Miss Marnott's view, also," said Mrs. Juggins, a fat, comfortable old lady, with a fat, comfortable smile.

CHAPTER XI.

"It's supper-time, my Lord:
It's nine o'clock."

King Richard III.

MRS. BLAND had a limited income, but an inventive capacity of a high range. If her purse was shallow, much shallower than her acquaintance imagined, her skill was deep. There was nothing apparently wanting to make her supper-table look complete. There was plenty, and there were some good eaters there, for Lackington digestions were notoriously healthy, especially among the gentlemen. But there was more than plenty, there was a decidedly *recherché* look about everything. A refined and studied elegance pervaded the whole. Even the hot mutton-pies were made doubly attractive by the adornments of the dish. Flowers were plentiful, yet not too plentiful. They won attention, not by their quantity, or even quality, but by a rare blending of colours, which those admired most who least understood the secret of

their attractiveness. The wine, too, was good, and here Mrs. Bland showed her capabilities. You can deceive the most experienced gourmand in the kitchen —the cellar defies all efforts at chicanery. Mrs. Bland knew this, and never attemped either to poison the ignorant, or digust the practised, drinker. The dishes were cheap, though no one knew it. The wine was expensive, and was duly appreciated, if not by all, by a certain few—and this was enough. These few were connoisseurs, and she knew that the statement that Mrs. Bland had a good cellar, would not only circulate, but would bring with it a proper amount of credit of several kinds. It was in itself a creditable thing to keep good wine; but it spoke also of affluence. People would whisper that Mrs. Bland, although she lived in such a quiet style, had resources for a large display, had she so minded. This was exactly what Mrs. Bland desired. She was successful. As she well knew, no one would be aware of the fact that the key of that particular bin was never touched till her next assembly.

Ebenezer Emlott had taken in Mrs. Bland, Maria having been made over to Johnnie. We are not at liberty to analyze his wishes; but whatever programme of action he had laid out for himself that evening must have been considerably disturbed—if Miss Bland had been omitted therefrom. Escape,

always supposing he had desired it, had been out of the question.

"That was a curious piece of music that Miss Marnott played," Maria said, as they sat at the supper-table. It was curious how mother and daughter had made Cécile the subject of their conversation. Even Johnnie perceived it.

"Beautiful, was it not? If the mirthful and yet the plaintive can go together, I should say that she united them; that is, the music was merry, but the tone of her playing had something sad in it. Did you notice it?"

"No, I cannot say that I did. You know I don't go in for quaintness, and that style of thing, Mr. John. There is such a tendency, mamma says, at present, for girls to cultivate peculiarities. She says it proves that a natural individuality must be wanting, and that must denote a lack of distinctive mental qualities. I only say what mamma says," said Maria, with an artless candour, which Johnnie accepted as perfectly genuine.

"Judging by mere appearances," she continued, "I should say that it must be very unsatisfactory to have to fall back on an artificial specialty in order to win attention."

Maria shook out her ringlets as she said this.

"But Mrs. Bland would not deny that a girl

might have some specific innate quality which, while it made her remarkable, was, at the same time, natural."

"Ah, Mr. John, how charitable you are! How nice it would be if we could all look at things as you do! I do so wish mamma had heard you; it would have pleased her so much. She delights to hear people talk in that way. She says it is a proof there is still much good in the world. Mamma likes to think we are not altogether bad; don't you, mamma?" Mrs. Bland sat the third from her daughter, it was quite possible for her to have heard every word.

"Yes, lovey. Oh, Mr. John, it may be wrong, but I am more and more convinced every day that I live that there is still a large amount of inborn goodness amongst us. It is so sweet, so refreshing to think it. I hope it is not wrong. You don't think it wrong, Mrs. Juggins?" This was addressed to her in right of her husband's office.

"Certainly not, in proper moderation," responded that lady, who, of course, was a firm believer in the inherent depravity of humankind. "My plan used to be to believe everybody to be what he or she said they were till I found out the opposite, and then never to believe them again, not if it were to my dying hour, ma'am. But I find it better now never to believe 'em at all. I speak of a particular class,

ma'am. I had a cook——" It was a harrowing story. Mrs. Juggins had told it with effect a hundred times. She cleared her throat and began again—the other start was simply preliminary. "I had a cook, ma'am, as came with a respectable character, and therefore I treated her and trusted to her accordingly. She read her Bible regular, and always at her meals. At breakfast, dinner, tea, and at her scrap of supper, she was always conning of the Scriptures meanwhiles as she was eating. That girl won my heart. She was a little too strong in her mislikings of the State Church, but I excused her that, for I have strong views myself—if the company will pardon me. Well, in course of time I missed a soup-tureen, and then a chem—a shirt, that is, and then a waistcoat of Mr. Juggins; and would you believe it?"—there was a pause of two seconds—"that cook took that tureen, that chem—that is, shirt, and that waistcoat, and sold 'em at a pawnbroker's." Mrs. Juggins always fancied that she had so concealed the plot, that no one could possibly suspect the cook till the *dénouement* was announced; therefore, she here took breath and awaited the astonishment of her hearers, which, of course, was accorded as a mere matter of politeness. Then came Mrs. Juggins' triumph. "And now, what do you think—what do you think, Mr. John—what do you think, Miss Maria—what do you——"

"Hadn't you better go on, love?" said Mr. Juggins, testily, across the table.

"—Think, Mrs. Bland," continued the old lady, accustomed to the interruption, and therefore not heeding it. "It came out at the trial, that that girl could neither read nor spell—not even capitals!"

All but the two Blands had heard the story before, but all looked confounded at the servant's hypocrisy. Mrs. Juggins' eyes glistened. A grim placidity stole over her wrinkled features. She gave way. She had had her innings. She was quite content to sit in the background for the rest of the evening.

Although the conversation had become thus general at that end of the table, Maria had no intention of it remaining so. She fell into a *tête-à-tête* tone.

"But, Mr. John, did you really like that piece of music that Miss Marnott played? I shall not tell any one"—Maria smiled and looked confidential—"if you will impart your private and candid opinion. I chanced to see your face, and was not sure whether your abstracted look betokened intense attention or absolute listlessness."

"It may be bad taste to confess it, but I never missed a note from beginning to end; but I did not know that I was betraying my appreciation to the extent you suggest."

"Oh, it was quite accidentally that I saw you," said Maria, apparently somewhat piqued. "Do you know, she has such curious notions about education. What will you say when I tell you that she has been advising mamma—imagine her advising mamma!—to give up the idea of Clara's learning music, and allowing Reggie to have the lessons in her stead? What use can music be to a boy? To a girl it is of the utmost consequence."

"It does sound strange at first," said Johnnie, thoughtfully."

"Mamma said she was never so much astonished in all her life—it quite shocked her. She said that it was quite a subversion of—— What did you say it was a subversion of, mamma?" asked Maria, who seemed to assume that her mother heard everything that went on.

"Propriety, love."

"Oh yes, propricty, Mr. John;" and Maria looked down demurely.

Johnnie looked at the other end of the table, at Cécile, perfectly unconscious of observation; she was talking with Geoffrey. The subject might be engrossing, for she and he were very intent. A little flash of pain struck through him; but he turned again to his companion, although he said nothing.

"She said Clara had no ear. Think of her saying

that to mamma, and mamma's family were all so ardently devoted to music. Indeed, grandmamma was quite distinguished as a singer, and composed the words and music of a song called 'Moonshine on the Fountain.' I forget the next line, but it rhymes with 'mountain.' I think 'mountain' and 'fountain' make such a beautiful rhyme. There's something so natural in it—strikes one at once, doesn't it? Mr. Marcourt, the music-seller at Bath, told mamma that when he heard the first line he felt perfectly convinced what the second line would be. Mamma was so pleased—such a delicate compliment, you know. The Marquis of Concannon, who was a great literary critic, when asked by mamma at the Assembly if it did not flow naturally, answered that it was so full of nature that it bore on the very face of it the indelible signature of spontaneous production. Mamma copied the sentence down as soon as she got home. It is on my copy of the song, at the corner, as a quotation, with the marquis's name underneath. So you can understand how disgusted—I mean amused—mamma was when Miss Marnott actually came down to ask her if Clara might give up her lessons, as she had no ear."

"But talent is not so wholly hereditary, I should think, that every member of a family must needs have the gift. Perhaps your sister is the exception, and Miss Marnott has found it out?"

"Oh, it is so delightful to hear you talk in that way, Mr. John. I do so hope mamma heard you, it will doubly convince her that her theory is sound."

"In what way?" asked Johnnie, innocently.

"To think of your suggesting such a thing—such a benevolent spirit, not to say ingenious! The charitable construction you have put upon her conduct will redeem Miss Marnott—all mankind, I may say—in mamma's eyes."

At this stage Mrs. Bland made the preliminary gesture, and ladies and gentlemen alike rose. Soon afterwards the guests departed.

"I have so enjoyed it, Johnnie, haven't you?" said Geoffrey, as he took his brother's arm, and started to walk home—Ben and his uncle following in their rear.

"Yes—I think so," said Johnnie, in a subdued tone. "I have only had Mrs. Bland and Miss Maria to talk to; and it is very curious, but they have talked of only one subject the whole evening—Miss Marnott."

"Cécile!—I mean Miss Marnott. How strange! But you did not object to discourse on such a charming topic? I know I shouldn't. I could have talked till twelve o'clock. I think Cécile the jolliest creature I ever saw."

"Does she let you call her Cécile?" said Johnnie,

staring at his brother with wonderment, though it was dark.

"Oh no, of course not—at least, I haven't tried; but one naturally talks of her in that way when she is absent." It seemed so utterly unnatural to Johnnie, that he made no rejoinder. "I have offered to call on her uncle some day, and take the children in the boat on the little lake. She seemed so pleased."

"You offered to go to her uncle's?" Poor Johnnie. He couldn't have summoned up courage to do this; nay, it would never have occurred to him if he had lived till ninety. Yet he felt as if he would readily go through fire and water to give the clergyman's children a pleasure—Miss Marnott's little cousins. "When will it be?"

"On Saturday. We can make an afternoon of it. That would be nice, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," said John, absently.

Mrs. Bland waited at the door till she heard the last retreating footstep, and then she ran with a speed which was marvellous back to the drawing-room. "Quick, Maria," she said; and instantly they set about blowing the candles out. These were carefully laid in a drawer. Then the hearthrug was turned up. Then the three antimacassars were folded. Next they went to the dining-room. The decanters were at once examined. The result was satisfactory—the ladies

had nearly all refused wine ; and the gentlemen, with the exception of Mr. Skillicorne, had been temperate. "I saved a glass, just as we were getting up," said Mrs. Bland, laughing. "I had kept Mr. Emlott busy carving all the time, and just as I made the move he took the decanter in his hand. I dropped my salts, and asked him to pick it up. It was too late then."

"You are so clever, mamma."

Mrs. Bland looked benignantly on her daughter. "I think we had better omit the Skillicornes the next time. Do you know, he drank three glasses of port, one after the other! It quite made me shudder ; but by an effort I preserved my presence of mind, and whispered to Jane to help Mrs. Juggins to a glass of port immediately. Of course, I knew Mrs. Juggins would refuse—she is a strict teetotaler."

Maria again looked her admiration. "Did you notice how Miss Marnott flirted with Geoffrey ? It was something quite outrageous."

"Her conduct was indeed shocking. But Miss Marnott is labouring under a false impression. The fact is, Maria, I have reasons for knowing that Mr. Emlott intends to leave all his money to Ebenezer. He is his favourite nephew, and bears his name. Of course, it will be nothing compared to Mr. John's fortune, nor will it give him the same position ; but it will leave Geoffrey without expectations."

"Except from his father's mill," put in Maria.

"The mill has been losing money for two years," said Mrs. Bland whisperingly, as if she was imparting a secret. "Mr. Emlott told me so in confidence."

"Poor Miss Marnott! Then you will not interfere in the affair, I suppose, should anything serious arise?"

"I think not. I think a girl who can lend herself to such a deliberate design—in her position, too—on the person of a young man like Geoffrey Lexley, merits the fate that is in store for her."

"It is very shocking, though."

"Very."

"Good-night, love."

"Good-night, darling."

CHAPTER XII.

"A quarrel, ho, already! What's the matter?"
Merchant of Venice.

ISAAC CURLING sat over his cabinet—and he had been sitting there for full three hours. Without looking absolutely uncomfortable, he had a mystified expression on his face; and, in good truth, he was utterly mystified. He had been poring over his papers—such documents from church registers as referred to local families, and events whose interest did not reach but a mile or two beyond the confines of Lackington. Of these he had a large stock. His past industry had reaped for him a large harvest of material, although in all probability its value would have appeared small in the eyes of the ordinary observer. Isaac had that curious instinct about him—a peculiar feature of the local antiquary—which made him copy down the most trifling particulars in relation to all the people about him. He loved, as it were, to hunt down everybody. There was not a soul in Lackington, whose family

was indigenous to the place, the ancestry of which, for at least two hundred years, he had not made the subject of a careful analysis. In this respect he had spared neither rich nor poor. If he had in his drawer an exact pedigree of the Skillicornes since Jonathan Skyllicorne first settled, from Chester, here, in 1644, he had also a family tree of the Gurnocks, whose proudest representatives for the same period had been content to push on in a small way the interests of a haberdashery business in Cotton Court. The successive Banyers who had hung about the stables at Grewby for a living, were not less familiar to him than the generations of the Grewbys themselves, who for so many years had hung, genealogically speaking, from the wall before him. He knew the secrets, too, of all these people. Whatever skeletons had frequented the cupboards of certain houses in Lackington, were as familiar to him as to those members whom their appearance was supposed more particularly to scare. There were one or two skeletons, too, of whose existence he believed himself alone to be cognizant. They were skeletons that somehow had got behind the wainscot; and those whom they might have terrified set their household gear there—their cups and saucers, and spoons and dishes—and were wholly oblivious to their dread presence. Isaac had no intention of disturbing the panelling and exhuming the ghost. On

the contrary, he rather liked the feeling that he knew secrets which those whom they immediately concerned did not know; and he allowed the cups to be hung in lines, and the saucers to be shelved in rows, day after day, and year upon year, all within an inch of the hipbone of the huge skeleton behind—and made no sign. I say, he liked it.

But he had never known—and the thought of his ignorance troubled him—that there had been a skeleton in the family of which Mrs. Banyer came; and they also were strictly a local family. For six successive generations, as he well knew—the register was before him—the Claypolls had dwelt in the heart of Lackington, and for at least six other generations previously to that they had lived at Glapton, which was but five miles away. Small farmers by occupation, they had seemed of that class of people to whom a mystery is an impossible adjunct; people unremarkable for anything saving it be the quiet regularity with which they had succeeded one another, and their steady adherence to Church and King, to which and to whom they stood in exactly the same relation they did about the year 1699—for all their knowledge of either had come to them by tradition unimpaired. For the rest they had a decided leaning—it might be called affinity—to bacon—especially fat bacon. Of all the folk around, the Claypolls had least fretted the social surface.

For a stated period they had existed, and by the stimulus of food had even grown. Then, like a log on a currentless pool, they had become sodden and soaked, and had slowly gone down with never a ripple of the water, as though to say that not even in their death could they create an excitement. Nor could they. Without giving birth to a single saying, without so much as originating a proverb, so that any one at the Three Black Crows could quote Caleb Claypoll, or add, "as James Claypoll once said," their pulse had stopped, always from natural causes—if a tendency to beer, brewed from their own malt, and attended with dropsy, or a fatty degeneracy of the heart, the result of bacon home-cured, can be so entitled.

All this applies to the men. It was not so with the women. The women had invariably gone into service in the families around, generally the Grewbys; and whether it was because they went early, starting in the scullery, or because of some characteristic that can only be a woman's, it would be hard to say, but the fact, at least, was clear, the female Claypolls were smart, cheerful, and willing. Good servants make good wives; and if all men don't see it, some do. So from being servants in other people's houses, the time all but invariably came when they became mistresses of their own, with cradles and children to boot. One or two, however, seemed to prefer staying

with the family, and of these Mrs. Banyer had bid fair to be one. Pretty and active, she had not been without her offers. Men about the stables had followed sheepishly at her heels; the small farmers had in turn courted her; even well-to-do and substantial yeomen —occupants of land, some of it their own—had made up to her; but she had turned a deaf ear and closed eye to all. The fact was, she and James Banyer, her young master's groom, had as good as spoken to one another on the subject, and they were contented to wait and to save. They had waited for some years, and then the death of Lieutenant Grewby had set Jim free, and he was removed to the Park stables. There Catharine Claypoll had followed him, after going to church first, and there she had lived with him ever since. I have previously made allusion to their married life, and those little disturbing influences which an occasional outbreak of beer on the stomach, with a tendency to fly to the brain, had caused. I have also related the incident of his death.

It was with respect to this incident that Isaac Curling was so restless this morning. That, of all people in and about Lackington, the Claypolls should have a secret, puzzled him greatly. It was some small satisfaction to him to feel that it was one of the women-kind who was in it. It would have so completely subverted all his views of men and things, if

any one of these log-headed Claypolls had been able to take part in a conspiracy so well contrived that not even he had got an inkling of it. Besides, to all appearances, none of the present Claypolls knew anything about it. It was not to be supposed that if some one of them had managed to bring a plot to a successful issue, he would be so thick-brained as to make no effort to reap the advantage that should accrue from it; this was to make them greater dodipolls than even he considered them. But when he turned to the women, and remembered Banyer's distinct and quiet statement, made on his dying bed, too, that Catharine was an heiress, he was quite as much puzzled. Catharine, judging from their few words that other morning, knew nothing of her claims—did not even know the direction in which they lay. She, at least, had had no part in any mystery, saving passively in the matter of her birth.

Nevertheless, Isaac's dissatisfaction did not arise out of the mystery as a mystery. It was only that he felt chagrined that he, Isaac Curling, genealogist, and discoverer of lost heirs, by profession, as blazoned above his door, on the street side, had been living in the quiet assumption that he knew every secret in Lackington; whereas, for maybe fifty years or more, there had been a secret of wondrous interest, and possibly wondrous importance, hidden under his very

nose, and he had never so much as scented it. The mystery as a mystery he was delighted with. To hunt this mystery out—to beat the bushes of the registers, to leap the hedges of piled-up and opposing evidence, to knock down the legal fence, to follow up the trail through all the multitudinous mazes and intricacies of the law—and at last to—— But we need not carry on the figure any further. Isaac was even now, as it were, putting on his leathern breeches, and mounting his horse—a hobby, 'tis true, and not a quick goer, but any amount of last in it—and for the result we must bide his time.

The first thing Isaac did was to collect several papers, and tie them with a piece of red tape. Isaac liked red tape—it looked legal and imposing. Mr. Skillicorne, the attorney, said indignantly it was more than imposing, it was an actual imposture. Having got his documents ready, he next turned his attention to himself. He went into his bed-room, and speedily returned with several articles of apparel; for he invariably dressed in the room that was in his eyes a triumph of antiquarian art. Here he arranged his high, stick-up collar with careful nicety—so high and so stuck-up, that from the side one could scarce help thinking of a one-eyed horse staring over a white-washed fence. Then he adjusted a sober black stock to his throat; then he changed his black coat for one still blacker;

and then he drew the starched wristbands from out their lurking-place inside the sleeve, bringing them nearly to the tips of his fingers. After this he put on a pair of black worsted gloves, which time had still more worsted, following this up by the insertion of his head in a large hat which, from the number of papers that had occasionally been crammed therein, had got a somewhat bulged and dropsical look somewhere towards the centre. Then he took the documents in his left hand and held them to his breast with a peculiar professional grasp, which he had acquired from Mr. Skillicorne himself, which was naturally extremely irritating to that gentleman; and then he walked forth, and along the street, looking with a sharp, keen eye now at his papers, and then at the people he met, as though the former were a power of attorney to prosecute the latter if he or she should dare to assert that he, Isaac, was not, and did not look like, a lawyer.

"And now to business, Mrs. Banyer, if you please," observed the genealogist with a prompt air, after he had refreshed himself with a cup of tea and half a toasted muffin. He had caught Catharine at her tea. As he spoke he drew forth the documents already mentioned, and began to arrange them on the table before him.

Mrs. Banyer wiped her eyes with her apron, and then set herself down.

"The questions I shall put to you, Mrs. Banyer, will have reference to a time further back than you may have anticipated. The explanation o' this will become manifest as we progress in our inquiries." Isaac paused, and then, with a clear and incisive manner, very serious withal, began his interrogations. Occasionally he would pull at his hair behind as if the streamers of a wig were there, and look at Catharine with a steady stare worthy a barrister of long and large practice. She was, in fact, in the witness-box. "You have two brothers, Mrs. Banyer?"

"Yes," responded Catharine, with fresh tears in her eyes.

"You are the youngest of three?"

"Yes."

"Your two brothers (and you had none else) are living?"

"Yes, at the farm."

"At the farm—exactly. They have—you will be careful here, Mrs. Banyer; have they—more correct to put it this way," he muttered to himself, as if some imaginary judge had called him to order, "have they any children?"

"Neither on 'em," replied Catharine; "neither boy nor girl."

"Quite so—neither boy nor girl," observed Isaac, blandly, as though the witness by her extra expla-

nation was falling into the very snare her questioner had set for her, and ruining her cause. "In this case," continued Isaac, "the question of your title to these estates"—he spoke as if he knew exactly where they were, and had a plan thereof on the parchment before him—"becomes an enlarged one. Had your brothers had children, these children would have inherited before you, supposing the claim to this property"—pointing to the parchment—"to have come down through your father, unbeknowns to him. Thus, as the case stands, I take it that your claim would be only a presumptive one, as the probable survivor of your brothers, both being so much older than yourself." This was all said as if much care had been bestowed on a delicate point. "Now, I do not suppose that your husband would ha' spoken so deliberately of a indirect claim. He said—what did he say, Mrs. Banyer?"

"You heard what Jim said. He said as I was the heir," replied Catharine, with a fresh application of her apron at the allusion to Jim's name.

"No; he said, 'It's Catharine—she's the heir.'"

"Same thing," responded Mrs. Banyer, with a sob.

"No, Mrs. Banyer, it is not the same thing—not in the eye of an experienced—o' the law, that is. Kingdoms have hung in such a balance as this; and

the difference atwixt these two ways of putting it has, as it were, elevated one dynasty and levelled another wi' the dust. No, we must be particular; and judging from this particular mode of expression, I have no doubt in my own mind that you inherit these estates through——"

"What estates?" interrupted Catharine eagerly, as he again surveyed his parchment.

"These estates, such as—and wherever they may be," said Isaac, somewhat confused.

"I thought you said as how we was to be 'ticular. It might be money, you know."

"Estate is a complex term, Mrs. Banyer—a very complex term. Estate denotes property, and property may be comprised of lands, or tenements, or stocks, or invested money, or money lying idle—in fact, Mrs. Banyer, estate is an involved expression, and, of course, therefore legal. It was as such I used it. Perhaps it would have been wiser to have selected a simpler term. I will continue. I have, I say, no doubt in my own mind that these—this property"—he slightly waved the parchment; he daren't look at it this time—"comes to you through your mother."

"Why not through Jim?"

"I was coming to that. It is impossible, if your husband's words are to be taken in their legal—I may say common sense—bearing. Why should he have

said, 'It's Catharine—she's the heir,' if, being alive at that precise moment, he were the heir? Your husband, Mrs. Banyer, was, I have reason to believe, of a truthful nature."

"Never told a lie in his life," responded the widow. "Never wife had a softer-hearted, tenderer——" And here she broke down.

"I have touched on a delicate chord. I know it. It grieves me much to distress you, Mrs. Banyer; but oftentimes questions have to be asked by the lips on subjects o'er which th' heart would fain throw a mantle. It is one of the most painful characteristics of our profession; that is—I mean you to understand that th' law demands it, Catherine. You assert with a firmness that—while it proves your warm affection—in itself would go far to corroborate your testimony with respect to the veracity of your late husband, that he was never guilty, to your immediate knowledge, of a single equivocation during the whole tenor of——"

"What's that?" said Catharine, sharply. "I said he never told a lie in his life. I'll ha' no fencing about that."

"I was only stating it——" He was again interrupted.

"You'll just state it as I say it," demanded the widow. "I'll ha' no aspersions cast o' Jim's name i' my house."

"I will proceed, ma'am. I need but quote your own expression, then, to show that your claim cannot arise as widow of—— You were his wife when he spoke th' words already twice stated."

"Ay, and for twenty-five years afore that, too."

"Quite so; his wife then, as you have voluntarily stated, for twenty-five years previously." Again Isaac eyed the witness as if she had made a confession most disastrous to her case. He looked with proud defiance at the discomfited appearance of several imaginary gentlemen retained for the other side. "We now come to parentage, Mrs. Banyer. I trust I shall not be considered impertinent if I make a few statements, inviting your dissent if I should be incorrect." He unfastened the red tape, and laid several papers on the table before him. "I have here various records concerning the past history of your family, Mrs. Banyer. To th' greater part on 'em I shall make no reference. Our conversation hitherto has so far relieved me of any necessity. My purpose now is to make certain statements relative to yourself. Your baptismal name is Catharine."

"Yea."

"Your maiden surname *was* Claypoll."

"Yea."

"Your presumed father was Timothy Claypoll,

who died August the twenty-seventh, eighteen hundred and twenty-one, at half-past two p.m., of a apoplexy. He had had beans and bacon to dinner at 12·30 the same day, had asked for more three times, and then fell asleep, and they couldn't waken him."

"Yes, it's all true; though hows'ever you know all that I can't say," said Catharine, looking at him with astonishment.

"It's our office to collect facts, Mrs. Banyer," replied Mr. Curling with a quiet dignity. "Let us proceed. Your mother was one Jane Hilditch, formerly scullery-maid at Grewby House, and then advanced to the respective posts of under-cook, housemaid, and lady's-maid. She married your father at Lackington church, February the sixteenth, seventeen hundred and eighty-two."

"That's true," assented Catharine.

"You are their only daughter. You was born the twenty-first o' January, i' the year of grace seventeen hundred and eighty-three."

"Nowt o' th' sort!" ejaculated the widow.

"The twenty-first of January, Mrs. Banyer," said Isaac very firmly, and very quietly, as if it were wholly unneccessary to do more. He glanced at his papers. "The twenty-first of January, in the year of grace seventeen——"

"Nowt o' th' sort, I tell you," interrupted Catharine.

"Facts, Mrs. Banyer, have been said to be stubborn things. I fear they are."

"Facts needn't tell lies, stubborn or no' stubborn. Maybe this trouble have oldened me, but I won't stand any man's adding two years to th' count, nohow. Twenty-first o' Janu-ary my birthday! Rubbitch. I was born seventeenth of May, seventeen hunnerd and eighty-five; and many a nice meal o' fresh young peas and roast lam' has James and me had o' that morn. Do you mean to tell me as we've been keeping th' wrong day?"

"I do, Mrs. Banyer. I do not wish to hurt your feelings, or to contradict any preconceived views you may ha' had with respect to the date of your nativity; but them peas and roast lamb was a mistake."

"Well, some does prefer it biled, 'tis true."

"I don't refer to that delicate and moot point at all, Mrs. Banyer. As you yourself admit, there's a di-versity of opinion on th' subject o' biled and roast lamb. That is not the question. The mistake lay in the day. You should ha' had your peas and lamb, whether biled or roasted—I say, whether biled or roasted—on th' twenty-first o' Janu-ary."

"And will you be so kind as to inform me, being such a authorized authority i' legal matters, how it

comes to pass as there should be peas an' lam' i' the month o' Janu-ary, sir?" This was put with studied humility.

Mr. Curling had fallen into a trap. He hum'd and hah'd.

"Facts, Mester Curling, has been said to be stubborn things." She sarcastically copied his tone. "I fear me they are. Peas and lam' i' Janu-ary! Law's law, and natur's natur. I should advise you to stick to things as you know, next time yo' coom a-seeing o' me. Born i' Janu-ary, forsooth! and me an' James's kep' it for this twenty years nor more o' the seventeenth o' May. Perhaps you'll be so kind as to say it again, sir; and add that it was in the year seventeen hunnerd and eighty-three, making me a two years older than I am. Don't mind me, sir; I'm only a lone widder, sir."

"Law is law, undoubtedly, Mrs. Banyer; and I am more familiar, 'tis true, with those formularies that are written o' parchment, and bound in—in——"

"Calf," suggested Catharine, maliciously.

"Vellum, Mrs. Banyer, than with that glorious constitutional code which Nature has imprinted upon th' scroll o' all her created works. Lam', I know, comes in wi' spring. It has an affinity thereto. 'Tis all spring itself. See it gambolling over the meadows, and you cannot doubt it, Mrs. Banyer. And peas, I

am aware—in fact, peas also are o' spring. They spring up——"

"Especially when parched, and on a bak-stone," added the widow, sarcastically.

"They spring up as the very off-spring of spring," continued Isaac. "I may confess, then, that knowing this, I was culpable. I allowed myself to fall into a lache—as the law has it—a momentary negligence. But this effects not the great fact. I must again repeat, Mrs. Banyer, that your birthday was on the——"

"Seventeenth o' May," shouted the dame.

"Twenty-first o' January," roared the gencalogist, now in a towering rage, "in the year of grace seventeen hundred and——"

"Eighty-five," shrieked the widow.

"Eighty-three," bellowed the antiquarian; "at number 10——"

"Holborn," screamed the woman.

"Pepper's Alley," yelled the man, before he had properly taken in her assertion.

"I'll throw that bucket o' swill at your head, yo' old doddled foo', if you say that again," cried Catharine.

"Holborn! Did you say Holborn?" gasped Isaac, half in terror, half in amazement. Let us be calm, Mrs. Banyer. Look at this extract from the

parish church register. 'Catharine, daughter of Timothy and Jane Claypoll, of 10, Pepper's Alley; born Jan. 21, baptized Febr. 16th.' The year is at the top, at the left corner—1783 is the inscription. I think you will see that it is all right."

"Of course it's all right," said Mrs. Banyer.

"Quite so," responded Isaac meekly; for Mrs. Banyer's hand still held to the bucket-handle.

"Who do you think it refers to?" demanded the widow.

"I thought it might possibly apply to you, Mrs. Banyer, considering all the surroundings. It would, at least, be viewed as circumstantial evidence, I believe, in a court of law." Isaac was still submissive; the peril was not quite over.

"It's my sister. She died two days afore I was born, which hastened my coming, I've yerd say. And I was born i' Holborn, and styled arter her name, i' memory thereof."

Poor Isaac! Never did man walk more dejectedly homeward than he. He had been utterly worsted where he had imagined himself so strong. Nevertheless, though his facts had been proved fictions, and his figures fallacious, there was one little crumb of comfort for him; and he went to sleep upon it as best he could. Catharine Banyer, born in Holborn, London, and Catharine Banyer, born in Pepper's

Alley, Lackington, were two very different personages. How many acts were to be enacted before he reached the end of this mysterious drama, he could not say; but evidently the play had begun, and the opening scene lay in the English capital.

CHAPTER XIII.

"A man that hath no virtue in himself ever envieth virtue in others—for men's minds will either feed upon their own good, or upon others' evil: and who wanteth the one will prey upon the other: and whoso is out of hope to attain another's virtue, will seek to come at even hand, by depressing another's fortune."—BACON, *Of Envy.*

"BEN, that's a fine girl, that Maria is?"

"Ay, uncle, she is a fine girl."

"You're right; and if I'm not mistaken she's got something more than finery about her. I took her mother into supper, lad, and depend upon it, I didn't waste my time. She as good as told me flat that the girl has money o' her own."

"Then I suppose it'll go into Johnnie's pocket? Everything goes there," said Ben bitterly.

His uncle gave him a look of contempt. "So you'd throw your chance away, because Johnnie and Maria happened to sit together at supper and talk a bit in the drawing-room. I heard their conversation, lad. Not but the girl's an eye to Lexley

Grange. I don't say the contrairy to that. But you dunna mean to say as you can't cut out that white-faced ninny i' a good honest tussle for a young lady as is worth having, and no mistake. If I thought that you was afraid o' Johnnie, I'd turn you over this very hour, Ben."

"Afraid o' Johnnie!" said Ben, curling his lip with disdain, and hiding therein its quiver of fright.

"I've some considerable savings i' th' bank, and my mill's prospering, and I've neither chick nor child belonging me, and my money's my own to do as I like wi' it; and I had thought, if I could find a tight young lad, say a nephew, wi' a bit o' spirit, one who took arter my own style——"

"Afraid o' Johnnie!" broke in Ben, with increased scorn.

"Maybe, I'd begin by taking him into the concern; and then i' the end—I'm not a marrying man, Ben—leastways, I'm not aware on it, if I am—the probability is as he'd take all as I'd accumilated."

"Afraid o' Johnnie!" cried Ben once more, with all the contempt he could concentrate upon the words.

"You see, lad, the fact is, I've got a idea in my head. It's been a-brewing well-nigh this twenty year, but I never see my way to realizing it till this past few months. I wish to find—I mean, *found a family*."

"And cut Johnnie out?" said Ben, looking stealthily at his uncle.

"Yes; why not? And cut out a' the Lexleys, except yerself, as is a Emlott."

"Oh, uncle!"

"At first I thought I'd set up one Lexley agen another; but I've other aims now. The day as I die, if so be as I continues like-minded towards thee, lad, you'll change your name for mine, and we'll ha' a Emlott family, as shall cut out the Lexleys, unto the third and fourth generation."

Ben seized his uncle's hand and pressed it.

"It depends on thyself, lad. Whatever I leave won't be big enough o' itself for what I'm planning i' my head; but if thou'lt marry as I advise, I see no manner o' cause why thou shouldst not level thyself wi' th' Grewbys themselves. Ben, Johnnie mustn't get this extra money."

"O' Maria's, you mean?" said his nephew softly.

"Ay, o' Maria's," responded Mr. Emlott.

"But are you sure, uncle, as the boy won't come in for all there is in that quarter?"

"*All* there is in that quarter is a larger *haul* than you think, lad. The young lady is heir, through her godfather, to a vast estate i' Scotland. She don't depend on her mother at all. All that's her mother's 'll go among th' rest on 'em. I know all about it,

lad," added his uncle, with a chuckle. "They lives i' a small way, I grant you. But that's where it is. Your over-refined gentlefolks takes a pride i' living i' that small but cultivated way. Your rich snob goes in for bigness—big watches, big conservatories, big houses, big eating. Your elegant lady goes in for everything as is small—small cottages i' the summer, small boudoirs, small watches, small hands, small feet, small——"

"Noses," said Ben, laughing slyly.

"Well, maybe that's a exception," said Ebenezer, not quite as amused as Ben hoped he would have been. "But then it's a Wellington, you see, and that makes o' the difference."

"What they call a 'Wellingtonia Gigantea,' isn't it?"

"Maybe," added his uncle, who knew as much on the subject as did his nephew. "Anyway, I say, they goes in for everything that's small. I keeps my eyes open, lad; and I've found as there's one maxim as allus holds good i' tip-top society, where I expects to see you a gracefully moving o' yourself some o' these fine days. It's this—'Gentility lies i' smallness.'"

"I thought meanness lay in that direction," responded his nephew thoughtfully.

"Ay, but that's i' low society. You see, what's

one thing i' one state o' society is its oppos-ite i' another," replied his uncle sagely. "Though that's a trenching on a very important and delicate subject, that is."

This was a gentle hint to Ben that his uncle was nearly out of his depth, and therefore he must put no further question on that head.

"You are sure that old Bland has money behind?" asked Ben, a shade doubtfully.

"I'll ha' no old Blands when you speak o' sich a lady as Maria's mother," said Emlott, crossly. "That's not the way to found a family. We must treat gentility in a likewise genteel spirit. Yes, Ben, I'll found a family, and you shall carry it on for me," said the elder briskly, recurring to the old topic. "I'll tell you a secret, lad. You know if you and I is to go hand-in-hand wi' this we mun understand one another. Ben, I want to pull your uncle Ralph down."

"Oh, uncle," said Ben, aghast.

"I mean it, Ben, and I'll do it. I'll pull him down. His mill shall come to a smash sooner or later; and as he goes down we'll go up. As Lexley's sun sets, Emlott's sun shall rise. His family shall give way to mine. He's only that estate to fall back upon, and it ain't worth half so much as it looks. It's badly placed. It will never sell for building—and that's all

it's good for—for a hundred years yet; and perhaps there'll be no more building wanted i' Lackington by that time."

"I don't like Johnnie," said Ben, "and I don't feel any call to like him; he's not my proper cousin."

Ebenezer seized his hand. "I hate him, lad," he whispered; "and I hate his father worse!"

"Uncle Ralph can't harm you, can he?" asked the nephew, in a tone which seemed rather to express astonishment than indignation.

"No, he can't harm me. I wish he could; for then I could hate him still more. I detest him just for that very reason, that I can turn and twist him round my thumb anyways nearly I like. And yet he treats me as if it wur the other way. Do you know, lad, that, while I've done wi' your uncle as I willed for over twenty years, he's the keenest o' contempt for me. He obeys me, but he scorns me. If I could only break him—if I could only bring his pride to the dust, I should be content. I used to think he had a secret; and if I could ha' got at it, I could ha' punished him rarely. But whats'ever it was, I don't seem to ha' gathered a hold on't—not even a start, as it wur."

"He may have one, for all that; he's very thoughtful at times," put in Ben.

"I'm not sure. Anyway, if he has a secret to hide,

he's got it hid so far," replied Ebenezer. "Good night, lad; and hold your head up to 'em all, for they shall all bend theirs to yourn, by-and-by."

This conversation had taken place, as the reader will probably have surmised, as Mr. Emlott and his nephew walked arm-in-arm back from the Blands' on the night of the entertainment. During the whole of that evening Mr. Emlott had never once allowed his eyes to relax their attention. Nothing had escaped him—the flowers, the elegant array, least of all, the wine. As he lay upon his bed that night—neither sleepy nor inclined to sleep—he pondered much on that wine. Ebenezer could decide upon a vintage as well as any man in Lackington; and he knew that not merely was such wine as Mrs. Bland had set before her guests costly, but it was rare also. If it was of the date he suspected, he had nothing to match it in his own cellars.

Ebenezer himself kept good wine. He had no pedigree of his own to boast of, so he was determined that his port should have it for him. Oh, what rich blood flowed through his cellular chambers, and how generously it circulated! For no host ever trotted out his distinguished ancestor more zealously than did Ebenezer his wine of a particular date. His family escutcheon was the trade-mark, his private seal the stamp. If others hinted grandly of Normandy

and 1066, they were met at once with Burgundy and 1791 ; and before a bottle was finished, somehow Mr. Emlott had the best of it, for in the end blood such as his could not but tell.

Nothing, then, in respect of Mrs. Bland's surroundings had struck Emlott so much as the wine. If she had thought she was undetected in her plan of preventing his drinking a second glass, she was mistaken ; but he only admired her the more for it. No man had any business to drink more than one, or at any rate, two glasses of such wine as that. Such an act would be nothing less than criminal. It was an extract, and as thus alchemic should be treated ; it was a quintessence, and should be met with quintessential respect. Skillicorne, indeed, had drunk three glasses off, in his own sight ; but as each circular rim approximated to the level of his lips, he could but think of a hog with a diamond hoop in its snout. He fairly tossed over in his bed as he recalled Skillicorne's indignity to that wine. But, after all, it was the insolence of ignorance. The thought brought him back to a state of repose. He, at least, had at once recognized and appreciated its value. He dwelt upon this ; it had a tranquillizing effect ; he fell asleep.

The next morning Mr. Emlott came down early to the Grange. He found the family at breakfast,

and he sate down with them. It was evident that business had brought him. He looked important.

"Ebenezer, you have news to tell us, I think," said Jane.

"Well, not news exactly," returned her brother, smiling blandly. "A little family business to discuss; that is all."

"Does it concern us all, uncle?" asked Ben unconcernedly.

"In a certain sense I think I may say that it does concern us all, and for that reason I have come at a time when I feel assured of finding you altogether." Ebenezer's English was always at its best at such times as these, unless he became excited. "The fact is," he began, taking up a piece of bread-and-butter and nibbling at it while he spoke, "I have been thinking for some months past whether it is not expedient that some arrangement should be come to of a specific nature with respect to the mill."

"Our mill or yours?" said Geoffrey rather quickly.

"I hope our interest in both is such as should mark a relationship so close as that of uncle and nephew," replied Ebenezer. "I am not fond—I am speaking for myself—I am not fond of these fine-drawn distinctions such as your remark would imply. It savours o' that supreme care for self which is oblivious to the well-being of others—nay, which

often leads to self-advancement at the expense of another's interests."

"Geoffrey's question was a very simple one, Mr. Emlott. You have not answered it," said Mr. Lexley hotly.

"I will answer it at once. The business I have come upon, and which has caused me to break in upon your meal thus untimely, concerns both my mill and yours. The fact is, I begin to feel the years creeping on me. I am not so strong as I used to be. My rheumatism, too, prevents me paying that close attention to my affairs down at the office which I should like. I propose to take one o' my nephews, and make him at once partner in the mill business, with a view to making over the whole to him when it shall please Providence to take me away from amongst you." All this was said quietly, as if he was conferring no favour of any particular kind on his relatives.

"Oh, Ebenezer, how kind of you!" said Jane in the pause that followed. The offer was a generous one, and it had come suddenly upon them all, saving Ben. None, however, looked more astonished than he.

"It is a generous offer, Emlott," said Ralph at length.

"It is noble, most noble," added Jane.

"Possibly it is. I believe the world—nay, I am

assured that the world would say that it was undoubtedly a generous proposal. But with the world we have nothing to do. We are either Emlotts or Lexleys ; closely allied by the ties of marriage, and still more nearly attached, I trust, by bonds of a surer and more enduring nature—mutual affection. On the ground o' this double union I disclaim all merit i' making this offer."

"Nevertheless, it is a generous—a very generous proposal, Ebenezer," again said Mr. Lexley. "I am sure the boys feel it to be so."

The boys all said so.

"You see, Ralph, there is another matter which it may be excusable for me to mention under the circumstances. You are several years my senior. I don't wish to look morbidly at the prospects of your immediate future ; but you, as well as myself, are come to years when it becomes an imperative duty to reflect upon the position in which your removal would leave those nearest and dearest to you."

"Certainly," said Mr. Lexley.

"There is Johnnie, for instance."

"He will be provided for," exclaimed his father quickly.

"As you say, and as I was about to say, Johnnie is all right. He will be provided for. And thanks to the care you have taken of the estate"—Ebenezer

was determined to be good-tempered this morning—"he will be comfortably provided for. In fact, he will be able to assume the position his name entitles him to. We come next to Geoffrey."

"Gip will stay with me. You will not take him away, please, uncle," broke in Johnnie for the first time. He and Geoffrey were sitting together, but the younger brother edged his chair nearer to the elder, and gave his hand a quiet grip under the table. Their hands remained thus closely locked till the conversation ended.

"I will forego any claim I may have, uncle, in favour of Ben," responded Geoffrey.

"I will see to Geoffrey's interests," said his father.

"Forego your claim!" exclaimed Ebenezer, eyeing his nephew with ill-concealed chagrin. He did not wish it to be put this way; and he was not quite sure that Geoffrey did not know it.

"I refer, of course, to the natural claim of seniority," responded Geoffrey, boldly. "You have just spoken so decidedly on the importance of not disregarding the ties of blood, that it occurred to me you might be equally anxious not to overlook the prerogatives of age. Therefore, to set your mind at ease, I said I forego any claim I may have in favour of Ben."

"Thank you for your delicacy," said Ebenezer

sarcastically. "I did not know that I was not at my ease till you mentioned it."

"It would have been better to have waited till your uncle had declared his intentions, I think, Geoffrey," added his mother.

"Geoffrey is of age," said Mr. Lexley. "He must have a voice in these matters. Besides, he is the most immediately concerned in this proposal. It is, of course, a most generous offer; but, the eldest being provided for, we must naturally turn our thoughts to him as the second in seniority. He's older than Ben."

"If the offer be generous and spontaneous, then I do not think 'claims' is a appropriate expression. When I wur young, we was taught to touch our caps and wait till we was spoken to of our superiors," said Ebenezer angrily, and therefore less grammatically; unless, his thoughts having gone back to his childhood, his education had travelled backwards with them, for association is powerful even to this extent.

"You have heard Geoffrey's explanation," said Mr. Lexley, with a harsh look.

"Apologies are sometimes preferable to explanations," exclaimed Ebenezer insinuatingly.

But Geoffrey did not offer any.

"Claim or no claim, then, I will take Ben," declared Ebenezer, angrily.

"That's right. Thank you, uncle!" cried out the two elder boys, eagerly.

This vexed Ebenezer most of all. He had never intended any one else but Ben to be his partner, but he had been anticipating a large amount of pleasure in this visit. He had planned to dally with the subject for some time, and even allow Geoffrey to suppose that he would be chosen. This would have given him pleasure. Then he had determined to throw him over with disdain. This would have been a great pleasure. Then he had arranged in his own mind to make some complimentary allusions to his pet nephew, and single him out with an air of decision which should at once astonish and make jealous the others. This would have been a crowning delight. But all was frustrated, and on grounds peculiarly qualified to upset all such expectations. No one seemed to value his offer but he to whom he had arranged it should finally go.

"I'll ha' Ben, and none other!" he exclaimed passionately.

"Quite right, quite right. A most generous offer," said Mr. Lexley.

"I say, again, I'll ha' Ben. I never intended it for none else." Ebenezer was on his feet, and he stamped on the floor with passion.

"It's very, very kind of you, Ebenezer," said Jane,

who could not perceive the cause of his wrath. "I'm sure Ben is grateful. Ben, haven't you anything to say?"

"I'm overwhelmed with my good fortune, aunt," said Ben, looking slily at his uncle. He had wit enough to know that any expression of thanks from him just then would be wholly unappreciated by that gentleman.

"Come, Ben," said the deacon, taking his hat; "I can't ha' you idling your time i' this gate—business 's business, as I'll ha' you know. You mun set your shoulder to real work now. Lexley's mill is one mill, and mine's another."

"All one interest between relatives, you know, uncle," put in Geoffrey, mischievously. Geoffrey felt peculiarly elated. He scarce knew why. He gave Johnnie a squeeze, which seemed to glue their hands together. "We'll have a jolly afternoon to-day on the lake; we'll make a regular holiday of it," he whispered.

Johnnie was so happy, he could not say a word; but Geoffrey knew his feelings exactly. And they went out, and to the mill; Johnnie, big fellow, as usual, with his hand on Geoffrey's shoulder; Geoffrey, as usual, supporting Johnnie.

"We'll never separate, Gip."

"Never."

"Not even if we should ever go from home."

"Not even then. But I don't think our lives will ever be cast out of Lackington."

"I should like to see London. If I found myself there, I should go straight to Westminster Abbey."

"Isaac has put that idea into your head," said Gip, laughing.

"I'll never go without you, though."

"We'll go together some day. Johnnie, aren't you——" Geoffrey hesitated.

"What is it, Gip?"

"You mustn't spend too much on Isaac, you know."

"What do you mean, Gip?" Johnnie looked astonished.

"You had ten pounds the day before yesterday, and this morning you had nothing, when Barnaby came for your subscription to the dispensary."

"I gave it away." Johnnie seemed disconcerted.

"Of course you did. Do you suppose I thought you had spent it upon yourself? But if you get into the way of giving such large sums to Isaac, he will come to look for them as a customary thing, and you might find it awkward to rid yourself of the burden."

"Isaac has not had a penny from me."

"Where's it gone to, then?"

"Don't ask, Gip. It's a secret," said his brother, laughing, but blushing also.

"All right, old fellow."

CHAPTER XIV.

"And if we meet, we shall not 'scape a brawl."
Romeo and Juliet.

WHEN Isaac awoke the next morning, the first and predominant feeling was that of defeat. Never had his great learning shown off to such disadvantage as in his encounter with Mrs. Banyer. He had been worsted by a most unworthy adversary—an ignorant woman. He had manifestly tripped, too, in the matter of the peas and lamb. In a side issue, which, in reality, had neither part nor lot in the great question of her antecedent history, he had been utterly routed. He felt sore. Indeed, as he slowly shuffled himself into his clothes, he had half made up his mind to give up the quest. He would retaliate upon Catharine by forsaking her cause; he would avenge himself of his adversary by a scornful obliviousness to her existence.

But this did not last long. Isaac was an anti-

quarian, less by profession than by instinct—and he could not thus easily throw aside the disposition that had governed his life since he was a child. As he sate over his coffee and thick bread-and-butter, the true position of affairs, and the relation in which he stood to them, became more perceptible. As the sun slowly pierces through and dispels the morning fog, so did the definite fact that Catharine had been born in London, dissipate those unwelcome shadows that had darkened his soul. He knew—it did not require a particular gift to know—that the very circumstance of one in Catharine's position being born in so far-off a place as Holborn, was of itself significant. Every Englishwoman was not born in London. London was very much further from Lackington then than now. There were no railways then. There was mystery at the outset. And this was satisfactory. How could Mrs. Banyer be living in such obscurity, and yet possess a right to a lofty heritage, without mystery somewhere? Mystery must be looked for; and, if discovered, inspire confidence. It would in itself be a kind of testimony to the reality of her claim.

It was evident that Catharine's reputed parents had paid something more than a flying visit to the capital. Poor people do not go to London—did not then—for a holiday. They do not carry infant

children with them to see the sights of that wonderful place; neither do they travel all that distance that it may be said that their baby was born there. The question, then, was, if occupation had driven the Claypolls to London, what was that occupation, and in whose employ were they? If Isaac had not got into such a passion he could have asked these questions last evening. He had not done so; but it did not matter. The Grewbys had been wont to spend much of their time in the metropolis. He could recollect how customary a thing it was for Miss Grewby, the invalid, to spend a given number of months out of every year in that gay place—not for its gaieties, though, but to be near the doctors. Other members of the family had accompanied her, but none so frequently as her brother, the lieutenant. To him its dissipation had been a great attraction. Although they had not a house there, they rented year by year a suite of rooms. And it was not till the lieutenant's death, and all its lamentable surroundings, had made that city distasteful to the present owner of the Park, that he gave up the apartments, and took his final leave of the capital.

It was clear that the Claypolls had accompanied the Grewbys in these visits. That they had both been servants in the household he knew as a fact. Isaac was accustomed to surprises. He had not learnt

those little secrets of which mention has already been made, concerning the domestic life of the grandfathers and grandmothers of the Lackington folk, without many a stare of unfeigned amazement. His first glimpse of the Lackington skeletons had always been accompanied with a certain feeling of awe and wonder. But it must be confessed that his breath came thick and fast, and the "blood mustered to his heart," as this connection betwixt Catharine's parents and the Grewbys flashed upon him.

The mystery lay in Holborn. It concerned the Grewbys!

This it was that caused that curious sensation to pervade the region of Isaac's pericardium. This was to jump at conclusions indeed; and yet it is doubtful if any one of the readers of this veracious, or voracious, history—ought I to say?—would not have done the same. In the elucidation of mysteries, is it not, after all, the unlikely occurrence which first engages our sharpened attention? A natural sequence of affairs—although we may have to come back to it in the end—is at our first setting out utterly despised. In this respect I believe science is with us. Let a case of mystery be set before the acute lawyer or the skilled detective, and either will instantly dive into the region of the improbable as the place where the work of discovery must begin. This jumping at

conclusions is often one of the most reliable instincts of our nature, and yet is as often founded upon the least admissible coincidences. To recognize that the unlikely is likely, is the secret of all success in the unravelling of mystery.

But Isaac had something else to fall back upon besides a hasty conviction. He could not have explained what that other something else was, and yet in his own mind it went far towards forming his conclusion. He could say that the Grewbys were odd, but he could not make exactly intelligible the term as thus applied. To the great majority of those with whom the Grewbys associated they would never appear so. They would be ordinary, and well-bred. And Isaac knew it. He knew that his own impression was the result, not of the observation of one single generation, but of many; not by inspection of flesh and bone only, but of paper and parchment also. He had studied the family from its foundation. He had acquired such information as none else would have looked for. He had reached it in quarters which none other would have approached. Your true historian of lineage has a key which will fit from the wine-cellar to the chancel vault, and all boxes, from the cabinet to the coffin; and he would seem, by that he knows, to have visited them, and wormed out of them their knowledge. He knows the language of device, the

dialect of shields; and heraldry lays open all her book for him to ponder thereupon. Oh, it is your genealogist who alone can turn headstones into gossips, and make the old and worn-out panel garrulous. What confidential communications pass between such crones as these! What secrets are whispered—what doubts made certain—what mysteries solved!

Isaac, since first he had drawn up that careful pedigree of the Grewbys, which hung from his wall, had known that there was a characteristic of oddness in the family, which was not of to-day, nor of yesterday, but of the entire past of the Grewby house. It was a peculiarity which, by the regular and natural order of its succession, might have been supposed to have been part of the estate rather than the individual, and therefore handed down of purpose. As nearly as Isaac could determine this hereditary taint —if so harsh a term could be used—it was a predisposition to self-isolation, or perhaps he ought to have said self-insulation, for they had no particular quarrel with the world. If Isaac's deductions from the formal and informal records of the family were true, the Grewbys had not merely been slow to make friends, but they had dissociated themselves very much from one another. Each member of the family had lived his own life. Brothers and sisters had inhabited the same house, roamed in the same park,

sat at the same table, and yet each had dwelt separately. When the time of responsible life had come, the men had always wandered; but only if provision were made for a solitary journey. They did not quarrel—happy the family whose dissensions were as few. They did not seem to be unhappy—far from it. If they were not remarkable for being merry and uproarious, few people were more disposed by common report to preserve an average of cheerful sobriety. Nevertheles, each lived a covert life of his own.

Isaac had a good memory. He could carry his thoughts back to his childhood, and the time when Mr. Grewby's father was in possession. He could readily recall the day when the lieutenant's death made the present proprietor heir to the estate. He could picture, as though it were yesterday, the consternation that fell upon Lackington when it was whispered that he had laid violent hands upon himself. Upon all these three—his personal observation could reach no further—the impress of this peculiarity lay strong. The father and son were constant in their mutual affection; and yet the one had wended his way, the other his. Even the brothers had lived separate lives. They never whipped the same stream on the same day. They met at the hunt singly, never together. They entered their pew in the chancel at

an interval of five minutes. But there was no prejudice between them. The sons were cordial, the sire affectionate. The deduction drawn by Isaac Curling from all this was, that if a private and clandestine marriage had been entered into by some member, tending to compromise the dignity of the family, this habitual secrecy of life would easily prevent such an occurrence from becoming known; and thus that particular individual might die, and not a shadow of suspicion rest upon him. How it had come to pass that the other party to such an alliance had permitted the transaction to lie unquestioned, he could not tell. This was the more awkward, as in all probability his only chance of unravelling this strange affair would lie on that side.

One thing was certain—he must see Mrs. Banyer again. And, however contrary to his inclinations, he prepared to go. But there was less of legal assurance about Isaac Curling as he entered the park-gate and knocked a second time at Catharine's door. His stick-up—he could not wear a clean one two days in succession—looked limp; his cuffs lay undisturbed beneath the sleeve; and, above all, he was without his tape and parchments. Mr. Skillicorne, whom he had met at the street corner, had greeted him with an affability which had tended not a little to disturb his equanimity; for well he knew what that meant.

Mr. Skillicorne had deemed him penitent for past misdemeanours, and had condescended to forgive him. But he would be revenged. Let him get over this coming ordeal with Mrs. Banyer—let him swallow, as best he might, all her banter and her sarcasms—and he would get his collar doubly-starched next week; and with the aid of some brand-new red tape, he did not fear to take down his legal rival.

"The information you imparted to me yesterday, added to the facts I had already gathered, force me to take the earliest opportunity of seeing you again, Mrs. Banyer. I hope my call is not inconvenient?"

"Not at all," said Mrs. Banyer, grimly. "On the contrair-y, I's been 'xpecting on you."

"That is well. I felt assured you would see, wi' me, the importance o' getting hold o' sich facts as we can fairly set to work upon."

"Ay, ay—that's it."

"By a comparison o' sich information as we was each acquainted with, and able to advance, we concluded, I think"—Isaac looked as if he was not quite sure, not having troubled his mind about it since yesterday—"that you was the child o' Jane Hilditch, married to Timothy Claypoll, and that your parents was, both on 'em, i' the service o' the Grewbys at th' House. Lastly, we agreed as you was born in London."

"Let me see—didn't we mention the year?" asked Catharine, in an indifferent manner.

"Yes, I fancy we did. Somewhere about—— What was the year we said? It is so difficult to recollect everything," added Isaac.

"*You* said seventeen hunnerd and eighty-three," put in the dame, with her hands on her hips.

"Ah—yes," replied Isaac, trying vainly to look at his ease.

"*I* said seventeen hunnerd and eighty-five."

"Of course you did. Now I reflect upon it, you did—you did, indeed, Mrs. Banyer."

"And *I* was right."

"Was it so? I dare say it was. A slight discrepancy somewhere, doubtless. Well, Catharine, and now——"

"Then we touched on the date o' birth, Mester Curling, if ye'll think on't. I've a kind o' impression you said summut about Janu-ary."

"Did I?" replied the miserable man as carelessly as might be.

"Perhaps it was you as said May, as you seem to ha' forgot it? Some folks has sich short mem'ries."

"I'd an impression it was you as said that," answered the genealogist doubtfully.

"Impression indeed!"

"Possibly it's incorrect. I can only say if it

was I as said May, I had clean forgotten it." Isaac thought he had scored here. He recovered himself somewhat.

"Out wi' you, mun, wi' your impressions, and doubts, and incorrections. Much chance we'd had o' finding out this secret if it had rested wi' you. Howsumdever, I bear no malice to none—leastways, not to you. But you mun use your wits to greater purpose nor this, or ye'll spile th' whole business. Ay, as you say, sin' I've tould you, I was born in Holborn."

"I am anxious to inquire, in the next place, have you any baptismal certificate, Mrs. Banyer?" said Isaac humbly.

"I've been a pondering o'er that the whole o' last neet, and I thowt I'd show you this. It came to me fro' my feyther."

Catharine stepped to a cupboard, and drew out a Bible as she spoke. It was a very old one, in no way more remarkable than that of most of the other cottagers in the neighbourhood. Every house had its big, old-fashioned Bible, in these parts, with several sheets at the beginning, or some other place, set apart for family registers. It was to be hoped Mrs. Banyer had other Bibles in the house, for this was enveloped in a thick coating of dust, which did not betoken much use. The backs, too, were half

eaten away, and the yellowed leaves had a musty smell. Fortunately for Isaac's purpose, no harm had been done. The record lay between the Old and New Testaments.

It was a Claypoll Bible. Upon several pages were inscribed, in all manner of characters, and in every stage of caligraphic art, the hatches, matches, and despatches of that family. The men-children seemed to be all Timothys, the women all Sarahs. No order had been preserved. As each domestic crisis had arrived, it had been entered in such places as seemed to have struck the fancy of the inditer. Thus some of the remoter ancestry were set down amid their posterity of the fifth and sixth degree. Grand-aunts came into the world at the same time as their grand-nieces; and the constant collisions, assaults, and counter-assaults between relatives who should have known better, was something distressing to behold. They butted at one another at every turn. Some of these records, too, seemed unintentionally biographical. The statement of the birth, marriage, and death of Catharine's great-grandfather, Timothye Claypolle, commenced at the bottom of the second page; and then, after running off the line at an early stage, began a terribly downhill course into the corner, and terminated abruptly at the edge. The last word was wanting, as if, impelled by the rush

behind, it had fallen over the precipice. If this were prophetical of that man's moral career, such an issue at its close must have been clearly foreseen. If his character, too, were to be gauged by the size of the type, he must have steadily sunk in the estimation of his friends. His birth was described in great primer, his marriage in small pica (he had evidently not married to the liking of his family), and his death, alas! was inscribed in a written character so diminutive that it would have put nonpareil to the blush. It seemed to corroborate that sentence of old, "Tell me what a man's life has been, and I will tell you his end." Whether or not such thoughts as these engaged the attention of these two who were now surveying the record, I cannot say. Isaac, at least, seemed struck.

"We was all good writers," said Catharine, in answer to his silence. She took it for granted admiration was the cause.

"Unique, I should say," replied the antiquarian dryly.

"You may well say so," returned Mrs. Banyer, not knowing what "unique" might imply.

"Him as wrote this must ha' had a eye to the prospective," said Isaac, with a slight twinkle of the member alluded to.

"Ay, they wur aw' far-looking men," she re-

joined, answering the word he had used, rather than the one he ought to have used.

"It's like Scripter," said Isaac.

"So it is. They copied th' letters from th' title-page," assented the widow with a touch of pride.

"Dun yo' remember th' story of the herd o' many swine running vi'lently down that steep place?" asked the visitor in a sarcastic tone.

"In course I do. What o' that?" inquired Catharine tartly.

"Very queer, ain't it? Somehow it comed into my mind th' moment I seed that entry," replied Isaac. "They was huddled together, you know, and got choked."

"Not so queer as yo' may think, Mr. Curling. When th' mind ain't quite on th' balance-like, it do jumble up things as is most oppos-ite. Yo' mun tak' care o' yourself, Isaac. Yo's far fro' well, depend on't. I noticed it yester-morn. Ha' you tried paregoric?" Mrs. Banyer inquired, in an assumed tone of anxious sympathy. "It's very soothing, I do assure you."

"Thank you!" said Isaac hotly. "I'll not forget to coom to you if I need it."

"That's reet. Meanwhiles, if you can hold-to your brain a bit, perhaps you'll see if there's owt as'll help you in th' search for me as is a heiress."

Once more Isaac humbly set to his work. The woman had had the best of it. He began at the beginning, and carefully inspected every single written character. Long practice had made him careful, and it was fully twenty minutes before he raised his eyes from the record. Then he got up and took the book to the window. Setting each single leaf by turns against the light, he closely inspected the paper itself, to see whether or not any entries underlay the more apparent ones; but in vain. Writing enough there was plenty, but nothing to interest them at this particular time; nothing to help them in their search for information respecting this mysterious avowal of Banyer's.

"There is nothing here, Mrs. Banyer. So we must proceed. Can you tell me how your late husband came to know of this secret? If we cannot explain that, I mun frankly state that I see little chance o' our success. Explain that, and we shall soon know what there is to be known."

"I dunna know," replied Catharine more meekly. She was disappointed. In her ignorance she had imagined that the family register would of necessity have supplied some information upon which they might have gone to work.

"It's very strange. If it had come through your side, 'twould ha' been different; but fro' him—

that's the rub. He wur a Kelston man, wur he not?"

"Yea, surely," replied the widow.

"He came to be stableman at th' House, and married you at th' parish church?"

"Yea, surely," said the other.

"You did not meet wi' him i' London?"

"Noa. I met wi' him at Grewby. Feyther seemed to ha' a liking to him. They used to say i' joke-like as he intended me to ha' him, and browt him o' purpose."

"Your feyther browt him?" asked Isaac.

"Yea; didn't you know that? There wur a vacancy i' th' stable for a young, active man. And feyther says, 'I'll go Kelston way; maybe I shall find one there—anyways, it'll be a bit o' a holiday-like.' He was away about a day or two, and when he coom back, he browt James wi' him." The widow got her apron ready; memories were cropping up.

"Did he know o' th' Banyers afore he went to Kelston?" inquired the genealogist.

"I canna be gradely sure. James allus hinted as though there had been a kind o' connection 'twixt us and them at some time or another. But I think he was only supposing o' it, and I wurna interested in't at that time."

"When did Jim first get agate talking o' them

silk dresses as he said he would buy thee some day?"

"Maybe it's five year ago, maybe four."

"Had he been away at that time?"

The widow reflected. "Nobbut to his sister's, at Newsham—Mrs. Kilvert, that is," she said. "His feyther died 'bout that time, if I bethink me rightly."

"Is his mother still alive?" asked Isaac, in a tone of interest.

"Yea; but, poor soul, she was too bedridden to coom to James's funeral. She mun be eighty if she's a day. But they say she's aw' reet i' other ways. She reads a good deal, and uses no spectacles, and likes a crack wi' a neighbour rarely. But she's few to talk to i' Kelston; it's but a smaw' place. There's neither church nor chapel within a matter o' three miles."

"Do you go much yourself?"

"Noa. The fact is, we quarrelt a bit over James—that is, Mrs. Kilvert and me. 'Twas about his drink. I said her husband drank more nor my James; and we had a regular set to, you may believe me. She's never axed me to Newsham sin' that day; and it mun be better nor six year ago, if I'm reet i' my reckoning. I axed her to th' funeral, but she wouldna come."

"You can't recall a single word that your husband

said, which might help me?" asked Isaac somewhat despondingly.

"No. He said once that if he wur ever i' London, he'd go and see St. Martin's Church, as was i' Bristol Street."

"Yes," said Isaac eagerly.

"But I don't think it wur anything to do wi' this matter. It wur a week or two after he spoke about my dresses."

"Had you been talking about this secret?"

"No. He'd been smoking his pipe, 'bout bed-time, in th' back kitchen—and that's jist what he said, and no more, when I went in to rake th' fire. I didn't tell you afore, for I thought it would be all i' here," she added, looking at the old Bible.

Isaac looked thoughtful. After a few words of caution about keeping the business to themselves yet awhile, he departed. The failure of the family Bible to impart information had altered Mrs. Banyer's views of the state of affairs. She had imagined that the register would reveal everything. It was evident now that the whole thing might end in failure. She was alarmed; and the more she was alarmed, the more she moderated her tone and manner to Isaac. She attended him to the door with civil words, and felt decidedly dejected when he was gone.

Isaac, on the contrary, walked with an unwonted

energy. Something had pleased him, that was clear. Perhaps it was this marked change in Catherine's demeanour—perhaps it was something else. He made straight for the church, and entered in. Nothing could hinder Isaac from being in his place at the daily service.

CHAPTER XV.

"Theirs too is the song
Of stream and headlong flood that seldom fails:
And in the grim and breathless hour of noon,
Methinks that I have heard them echo back
The thunder's greeting."

The Excursion.

THERE was a small stream-lake on the north-eastern side of Lackington, formed part by nature, and part by the industry of man. Far below it stood a water-mill, and this was kept going thereby in the dryer seasons. The Scudd did not actually pass through the town; rather it skirted it on the northern side where, on a reach of meadows, the mother church still stood, and then meandered through a valley which, at first narrow, gradually widened until it lapsed and lost itself in the open champaign beyond. This, in its turn, was terminated by the sea some twenty or thirty miles away. The Scudd was yet young and fresh in this part, for the hills that fed it were not far to seek. Lackington itself lay close to those last shelving

slopes which mark the declination of some more distant and extended range of hills. Indeed, between these undulations could be seen the far-away outline of one of these same discursive and elevated tracts. In the autumn twilight it was a glad sight to see their purple front against the blue and serene sky; and even now, in the warm and clear shine of June, one looked upon them with a thankful eye; for they added beauty to what was already fair, and gave that background of solitude and silence without which no landscape can really quicken the spiritual pulse.

Through one of these latest depressions of the land flowed the lucid stream called the Scudd. Its name was suitable—and in this place especially. So precipitant was the valley that the water "scurried" downward with what would have been, in a deeper and larger bed, a tumultuous rush. Sometimes, when the season was rainy, and the declivities had, through a thousand little fissures, and crevices, and crannies, multiplied the volume of the stream, it tore along with such lurid look and threatening menace, that mothers, with loving frowns, would bid their children keep away from the valley path. At times like these, tradition was strong upon the hearts of Lackington folk; and the old people had their turn, and told how continued rains had swollen the flood till it had swept away a watermill, and drowned a miller or two.

There was a story of a tinker, too, who had been met by the overflow on the pathway above, at least twelve feet higher than the normal tide, and hurled against a boulder, and of course killed. But this was only related by the very oldest, and there was none to gainsay the tale. Under such circumstances, it is astonishing what "giants there were in those days," whether they be giants in the shape of men, or windmills, or watermills, or floods.

But we do not get our deserts at all times, and just now the millers and tinkers were secure. It was the farmers' reckoning. There had been a dry spring, and they were crying out. And well they might, for all the land looked parched and moistureless. The grazing meadows seemed as if they had been browned before a slow fire, or as if they were a common, and everybody's cattle, including geese, close grazers all, had pastured thereupon. The mowing grass, too, stunted and shrivelled, swooned on every side, and smelt as though it were already hay, and would for this year dispense with scythe, and fork, and hayband, and cider-cup for the croppers, and barn, and lie listless as it was, for winter's use. Oh, what would come to all our poets if such summers should be annual! Added to this, the prophets had prophesied falsely. The husbandman had sown for a moist season, and lo, a dry. Thus a double care sate on his brow. Vainly

he yearned for change; but no change came. Oh, how he strained his eye at sunset if but a shadow would rise athwart the sky! But no cloud appeared, not e'en enough to overlay a dwarf's big hand. And things were growing worse; for every tree looked like a ship becalmed upon a motionless sea, and the earth was becoming distempered with the still heat.

But such things cannot last; and the change came.

On that well-remembered day, the morn was preternaturally still. At high noon a dead calm of heat lay upon all. Even the birds were overcome with the sultry oppression; they had ceased to warble. And then a soft wind blew from the west; and as it blew, a cloud showed itself betwixt the distant line of earth and sky. What a cloud it was!—so black, so thick; the wonder was it did not fall—so heavy, so solid, it was. Within a minute every farmer was aware of its appearance; but as he gazed thereon, somehow he did not seem so glad. But the soft wind grew into a fresh wind, and with it came other clouds as black and bank-like as the first, and they rose as they came nearer, till all the western side was blotched with detached masses of cloud that marched irregularly, and seemed like moving military turrets, but messengers of that more serried body which was not as yet above the line. Opposite, the sky was leaden—all the blue had faded out of the expanse.

The leaves began to rustle; one by one, as if you heard them individually. I had almost said tinkle—they had become so metallic. And then a clap of thunder came, that made the rafters shake, and the cattle ran round and round the field. What a clap it was! It began with a rattle, and ended with a drum. But all the children of the gods might have swung that rattle, and Jupiter himself must have been the drummer. One could not tell whether the last echo or the last natural rumble had had the best of it; but they kept on, in every hollow, and through every wood, till sheer exhaustion must have compelled one at least to give it up. Never had such a continued peal been heard—not even by those two or three who remembered the tinker's end. They were far too frightened just now for recollections. Let them survive this, and then, maybe, things will be different—the giants will be trotted out again. At present they are quaking and crying, "Lord, ha' mercy on us!"

How shall we describe the flashes, the thunderings, or the rain that followed? It was not rain; for, after a short prelude of monster drops, the vapour seemed to dissolve itself into a flood, and like a flood it descended. The pent-up powers of weeks and months were released, and Nature, chafing to avenge herself of such imprisonment, vented all her eager

passion in a deluge of three hours' length. Never was such rain. I take myself to task. Again I say it was not rain, it was a universal waterspout. The roads ran like swollen streams ; the meadows became lakes ; the hedges were but land-lines ; and every stack and stead formed itself into a little island—for a short interval.

And then—'twas gone. Who will credit it that on that eve there was as fair a sunset as ever man and nature smiled upon, and ere the gloaming had fairly set in, not a cloud could be seen, not even the trail of them that had gone on to east? And then, like frogs emerging from weedy waters, the old women again began to lift up their throats and croak. And this the burden of their song—that in a certain year—oh, how far back it was!—there had been such a tempest as this, only there had been a louder gale, and forests had been laid low, and so many sheep drowned, that mutton had gone up, and skins gone down, so that the market had been thrown into a perfect fluster ; and—— But let us stay. We cannot stop their tale, but we need not listen. They have gaping hearers enough without our ears, and the giant is all abroad again.

Let us turn awhile to other things. It was upon this morn that Geoffrey and Johnnie worked at their daily business till noon, and then—for it was Saturday

—they gave up their toil for the week. It was the day that Geoffrey had arranged for the boat-excursion on the river-lake. To-day he, and Johnnie with him, though his was the plan, were to row the clergyman's little children on the water; and Cécile Marnott would be with them, and, perchance, the clergyman himself. But this depended much upon his progress made within that little room he called his library—perhaps on the "lucus a non lucendo" principle, because he had so few books in it—or perhaps he clung to the name, though he had so little to spare for buying them.

When the two young men reached the water, they were somewhat surprised to find both Mrs. and Miss Bland stationed at the door of the boat-house. They were gaily dressed, and had an unmistakable look of being two of the party.

"Good morning, Mr. Lexley," said the elder, advancing with a ready smile. "You will be surprised to see me, I am sure. But perhaps you are unaware that Mr. Haddock's coming is uncertain; and as I am in a way responsible for Miss Marnott, I thought it better to be present, just for appearance's sake, you know. People will talk, especially about governesses."

"That is true," said Geoffrey, laughing. "I've been talking about her all the way. As for Johnnie, all other topics have become 'weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable.'"

"You must not believe all that Gip says, Mrs. Bland." An indescribable look had gone over that lady's face. "He's a most wonderful romancer. Besides, he only wished you to know that he had heard of 'Hamlet.'"

"I think it must be so. If I heard aright, it was your brother who planned this excursion," said Mrs. Bland, smiling.

The four elder Haddocks now appeared, attended by Miss Marnott. The oldest would be about eight, the youngest three. Mrs. Bland looked relieved. "We must wait for papa, please, Mr. Gip," said the eldest, eagerly. "He's coming; he's only stopped to speak to old Betsey Moyle." Mrs. Bland looked uncomfortable.

"You must say Mr. Geoffrey, Alice," reproved her cousin, blushing.

"Oh, don't say so, Miss Marnott. I'm particularly fond of the name—in fact, I'm used to it. I'd quite forgotten to look upon it as a familiarity."

"Cécile calls you Gip," put in Bob, the incorrigible of six summers, or rather winters; for he was born on Christmas Day, and got four times as many presents in consequence.

"Oh, Bobbie, you shouldn't tell tales," said Cécile. "The fact is, Mr. Geoffrey, I tripped—or the children will have it I did—this morning, as I was preparing

their breakfast. The boat was the one absorbing subject; and they were all talking about your kindness in promising to take them on the lake this afternoon. They would persist in calling you 'Gip;' and so at last I said, 'I think "Gip" will suspect you are a forward little set of minxes.' And they will have it that *I* also am guilty."

"They do not understand what a quotation is, yet," said Geoffrey, anything but displeased with Cécile's remissness.

"Here comes papa. Mamma would not let him stay in. She pushed him out; didn't she, Ally?" said Bob.

"Yes, she pinched him," responded Alice.

"All in play," put in Cécile.

"Oh, yes; only play. I do so like to see mamma and papa play—dey squeal so," added Georgie, aged three years and seven months; and a splendid howler if his bread-and-milk were not ready at 7·45 every morning.

"And who else squeals besides mamma and papa?" said Cécile.

"Georgie!" that individual responded in triumph.

It was evident that one boat would not suffice for all; so another one was brought out. Into the first got Mrs. Bland, Mr. Haddock, and two of the children. Into the second, which was larger, were helped Cécile

and the two younger children, together with Maria Bland and Geoffrey.

"Mr. John, I shall have to ask you to get into our boat. I do not row," said the clergyman.

This arrangement did not seem satisfactory either to Mrs. Bland or Johnnie; but whether their dissatisfaction arose from the same cause it were hard to say.

"I'll go," whispered Geoffrey.

"No, Gip, it is better so," said Johnnie, somewhat sadly; and he at once, without delay, entered into the first boat, but not without catching the eye of Cécile Marnott, and somehow he fancied she looked sorry, too.

Geoffrey and Johnnie both stripped them of their coats; and as the boats were plied together up the stream, all went merrily. The children were wild with delight. They would put their hands in the clear, pellucid water, and fret the current, or burst the bubbles, or catch the floating blossoms, or snatch at the overhanging boughs, while Cécile in one boat, and Mr. Haddock in the other, played the guardian. Then they would take their turns at the rudder, and steer the little craft into a bush—then out again into the mid-stream, not exactly to the comfort of the rowers; only never a murmur was raised, for it was the children's excursion, and for them alone it had been planned—at least, on the face of it such had

been the arrangement. If unceasing laughter, if continued screams of rapture from them, were testimony—they at least appreciated that which had been done for their pleasure.

Meanwhile a change had taken place in the heavens without their observation. This long and narrow stream-lake was so set in a narrow vale, and overhung with thick trees and clustering furze, that little of the sky above was visible. A loud clap of thunder made every one start—so prolonged that they thought it would never cease. Mrs. Bland performed a little solo shriek, and instantly from the other boat Maria made a duet of it.

"Oh, see what large drops of rain there are, Cécile. Arn't they pretty?" said Bobbie, entranced with the prospect of being wet to the skin.

"We had better get under the tree there," suggested Geoffrey.

All assented but the Blands, who declared their profound conviction that it would be instantaneous death if a flash of lightning were to penetrate the gorge. But, alas, they alone had anything to spoil, and parasols were all their protection. Reluctantly they gave way, and the boats were quickly propelled beneath the shelter of a huge elder. They had reached the upper limit of the pool, and it would have been pleasant indeed to watch the little water-

fall had there been a larger stream—for it was prettily placed at a sudden sharp curve of the vale, and then seemed to issue from some hidden spring beneath the dip behind.

The rain began to fall in a torrent. A gust of wind, too, rushed up the lake, and, as if in an instant, tore up the smooth garment of the water into strips. The waves, each bigger than the last, beat against the boat, and broke backwards into foam. Cécile, anxious for the children, suggested that she should get out with them, and seek a still more secluded shelter higher up amid the brushwood and gorse.

"Much the best plan," said Mrs. Bland, trembling with fright. "We must think of the children." She had been oblivious of their presence hitherto. "I will take care of these two dear little things, Cécile. Let us get out at once, by all means."

In two minutes every one was under a thick umbrella of foliage. The children thought this the best part of the afternoon's fun, and looked as gratefully on Geoffrey as if he had fore-ordained everything for their special enjoyment. Nothing could alarm Bobbie; and he stared at the affrighted Mrs. Bland, as she crouched under a large abutment of rock, with something which, had he been older, might have been mistaken for contempt. It was all a play to him, and the thunder was the orchestra. Unfortunately, he

would persist in having a front seat, and got wetter than ever. But the downpour continued ; and in course of time even he began to find the performance monotonous. The elders, too, despite their best care, were thoroughly drenched ; for a forest of leaves, laid in layers, could not have withstood that storm of persistent rain. A consultation was held, and it was decided that Geoffrey should go to the inn below, and get all the wraps, waterproofs, umbrellas, and shawls that he could lay hands on, and bring them for their use whenever the tempest should abate enough for a movement homewards. There was an old tarpaulin at the bottom of one of the boats, and with this for a covering, he climbed the rocks and started down the path.

He had scarce disappeared from sight before a ray of sunshine darted through the leaves and glanced upon the lake, and almost as suddenly as it commenced the storm ceased. It was deemed advisable to wait awhile, however.

"How beautiful the waterfall must look! How I wish we could see it!" said Cécile. "Do you hear how it booms, Ally?"

"Let us get round the rocks and watch it, Cécile," suggested Bobbie, eagerly. But to this his father strongly objected.

To his disgust, Johnnie, who owned no one as

master just now, disappeared round the corner alone. Bobbie instantly registered a vow as to what he would do when he was as old as Johnnie.

"You must come, Miss Marnott. The cascade has become a cataract. There is quite a little cloud of spray below."

"Would you like to go, Maria, dear?" inquired Mrs. Bland.

"No, thank you, mamma," answered Maria peevishly. She was wet and cold, and angry. Both Geoffrey and Johnnie had been talking two hours with Cécile, to her neglect. "I think it was Miss Marnott that wished to see it. I am not fond of climbing."

"I think you might go, Cécile," said her uncle, "if you will be careful."

"I will be so cautious, uncle, dear," his niece rejoined, who longed to see the rush of water.

Johnnie, declaring his conviction that it was quite safe, assisted Cécile down the little slope, and round the crags at the foot.

It was a glorious sight. They had advanced by the aid of sunken boulders that yet appeared above the water's edge, immediately at the base of the cataract; and as they watched the livid mass of water leap from its narrow fissure upon the ledge, three feet below, and from thence in a fury of foam and

cloud of spray down to the rocky cavity beneath, they stood in spell-bound silence. How it churned away in that little confined gulf at the bottom! How the water fretted and chafed as it caught the ragged, broken prominences!

"If I could reach that level there I could easily scale the rest, and watch the flood sweep through the gorge," said Johnnie.

"I would not try, Mr. Lexley. I am sure it cannot be safe. See, even now the volume of water is increasing."

But Johnnie was not just now the Johnnie he was wont to be. He was filled with the elation of intense happiness; and already he had fixed his long fingers on the ledge, and with a spring, and by the assistance of a step, which the water had itself at some time or other worn into the rock, he overcame the first and great hindrance. In another moment he stood above the cataract.

"I hope you feel repaid for your trouble," said Cécile, laughing; for the rock-moss, doubly moist with rain and spray, had stuck to his hands and clothes, and made him far from presentable.

"Quite. The gorge looks so dark, and the water so livid, that I feel——"

Cécile looked up quickly. He had suddenly stopped. Johnnie stood transfixed with horror. He

gave one wild look up the defile, and then turned round upon her and hissed, rather than said, "To shore—to shore!"

Cécile did not stir. She did not understand. She only stood still and trembled with fright. She imagined some evil had befallen Johnnie.

He saw her hesitation. With a low cry of suppressed agony, he seemed to throw himself down the precipitous bank. How, in two or three hazardous leaps he had reached the base, jumped the sunken stones, and seized Cécile rudely round the waist, they could never tell—never even, in after days, when they were cool and calm. Without word, save a smothered sob—for so it sounded—he turned him round, and literally threw his burden shorewards. As he did so, a black mass of water, of raging, raving, tearing, wrathful water, came headlong from above, and threw him, as though he were a cockle-shell, slantwise against a fallen boulder. Cécile was untouched. It seemed to graze her body like a wheel. Had they stood two yards lower down the lake, both had been lost—nay, but a single yard. So great had been the rush, and so confined the flood, that as it distributed itself from the upper fall it still preserved for a few yards its solid, serried frame. Its hither arm had struck down Johnnie, and by its own outward bias had thrown him to the bank; and Cécile, in perfect safety,

though she knew it not, dragged him by the shoulder, and with that unsuspected strength that women find at moments such as these, she laid him, dead, as it seemed, upon a patch of green. And then she cried aloud for help as she knelt by him. The flood, with resistless volume, swept on, and quickly swelled the lake.

But Cécile had not needed to raise a cry. Geoffrey was already beside her, and the clergyman was behind. Somewhat unkindly it looked, the former pushed her aside, and lifted his brother up, and carried him upwards out of the pathway of the flood. She was forgotten for the moment—his tenderness was all for Johnnie. The blood was spurting out from a deep gash above the left eye, and there were marks of bruises on his head, and cheek, and arms. For the rest, his limbs hung lifeless—and he looked dead.

The moment Mrs. Bland and Maria saw the seeming corpse of Johnnie carried up the slope, they set up a dismal wail—"He is dead! Mr. Lexley is dead!" and both ran as hard as they could, down the pathway—for help. Their nimbleness was wonderful, if somewhat undignified. They were to be found afterwards, shaking like aspen leaves, in their double-bedded room, each on her own couch. The servant was administering hot brandy-and-water, and the odour of perfumes also was strong. They had,

of course, poor things, forgotten their Samaritan intention.

"Oh, mamma, why would you go?" gasped Maria.

"It was for your sake, child. 'Tis hard to have the dispensations of Providence thrown in one's teeth," replied Mrs. Bland. Perhaps this was why they chattered so.

"If we had been engaged—imagine," whispered Maria, as the maid left the room.

"Let us be thankful, love. Crape is so expensive just now." And once more Mrs. Bland's extreme sensibility was too much for her. She had to drink half a glass of brandy and hot sugared-water off, and re-apply the salts to that sensitive feature that had brought in triumph the deceased major to her feet.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Look! he recovers."
As You Like It.

BUT Johnnie was not dead; and if Mrs. Bland and Maria were very thankful, their thankfulness was, nevertheless, tempered by the reflection that they could not have failed to show off badly in the general excitement that followed the accident.

It was rather hard upon Cécile Marnott, that she was made to bear the brunt of their dissatisfaction. But so it was. There are so many different views of forwardness in the world, that it is difficult to understand what that term strictly implies; but under such a vague and indefinite title was set all the governess's conduct of the eventful afternoon. With that affix was everything she had done and said distinguished by Maria and her mother. As people mark clothes, one article after another singly, and with indelible ink, so had they taken each word, look, and gesture, and flattened it out, and set thereon the impress of

"forward," and then ironed it, so that they might know it again.

Her going at all had been forward, according to Maria.

Her getting into the boat in which Johnnie was not, was so forward, because, while she might seem careless of his presence, it gave her so much more opportunity of playing a conversational battledore and shuttlecock with him from boat to boat. This was forward in the extreme, as well as deceitful, according to Mrs. Bland.

Drawing attention to the waterfall came under the denomination of forward, according to Maria.

Visiting it alone with Johnnie, after Maria had shown the impropriety of the thing by a flat refusal, was forward, according to the code *à la mère.*

She skipped so over the stones, which was forward.

She took Johnnie's hand when there was a wide jump, which was forward.

She had answered all questions addressed to her by the gentlemen without so much as hanging down her head, or looking confused, which was forward.

She had expressed a decided opinion several times, which was forward.

She had looked surprised at seeing the two Blands there, which was forward.

Geoffrey, Mrs. Bland thought, had seemed very much at his ease with Cécile, which was forward—of her.

Maria was sure that Johnnie was in love with Miss Marnott, which showed great forwardness, of course, on the part of the latter.

Mrs. Bland laughed at Maria's entertaining such an absurd notion; but the very idea itself proved that Cécile was forward.

Thus the governess had a very hard time of it. For while Mrs. Bland and Maria thought and said all this to one another, they were careful not to make any direct charge against her; only they treated her in a peculiar fashion, which made her intensely uncomfortable. They paid her a deference which was in itself insulting; listened to her with an affectation of attention which was most irritating; and dwelt upon every sentence she said as if it required as much consideration as "It's a fine morning" from a princess. Cécile Marnott could not understand what she had done to cause this ill-feeling; for that it was such she could not doubt.

"Miss Marnott will take some salt, Maria," the widow would say with a stately respect.

"Oh, thank you, I do not want it," answers poor Cécile, uneasily.

"Miss Marnott says she does not want it,"

Mrs. Bland repeated after her. "You need not pass it."

Day after day passed on, and still Cécile was made to eat, talk, and conduct herself generally on stilts. Nothing was natural. The Blands were coldly respectful, disdainfully deferential, and she was very miserable. Besides, there was another matter in which she had much sorrow. If Mr. Lexley died, she knew that she would be the cause.

If she had not asked to go and see the waterfall this could not have happened. Nay, the cause was not so secondary as this. Mr. Lexley was in despair of his life from the direct effort to save hers.

Morning, noon, and night, and in the still and silent watches of the night, this thought was ever predominant in Cécile's mind. She listened to every message concerning the state of Johnnie as a criminal listens who is awaiting a doubtful sentence. "He is better to-day" meant a chance for a verdict of "Not guilty." "He is still unconscious," or "The doctor thinks the fever slightly increased" meant "I am a murderer!" and till a more favourable bulletin was issued she looked as if she were. She grew paler and paler. Want of sleep, and a persistent effort to accomplish her round of daily duty, made all the healthful hue to quit her cheek. She could not eat. Pretence was all very well in the schoolroom, but at

the tea-table, or at dinner, it was impossible. She dined at the Blands', and, of course, they speedily detected her waned appetite, and made the most of it. For a certain reason, too, it irritated them.

"I fear this weather is trying you, Miss Marnott. Such a fragile constitution as yours demands a more balmy summer."

"I am very well, thank you," said Cécile with an imploring look, as if to ask that the topic might not be continued.

"'Tis wonderful how Maria keeps up, poor child!" Maria was not in the room just now.

"Miss Bland is not well, is she? I am very sorry," replied the governess.

"Not well, Miss Marnott! What a—— But, 'tis natural. It is only the mother's eye that can detect those deep and silent fluctuations which mark a troubled heart reacting upon the spirits and the frame. Poor Maria! She keeps up with that brave nobility of soul that martyrs are made of. Not even a sigh escapes her lips. You may have noticed, Miss Marnott, that not even a sigh has passed those lips of dear Maria's since—since the awful tragedy itself occurred?"

Miss Marnott was obliged to admit that she had not heard one. The allusion surprised her. What had Maria Bland to do with John Lexley's accident?

"The flush of health and vigour still remains on her cheek, you will perceive," said Mrs. Bland, categorically.

Miss Marnott perceived it.

"She can talk calmly and dispassionately, as of yore," said the widow. "You must have observed that?"

Miss Marnott had observed it.

"Her appetite has not failed?" demanded the elder lady.

Miss Marnott thought not.

"And yet there is a something—an intangible, and yet pervading something—that speaks that she is changed," added the elder lady.

"Very cross to me, especially," thought Cécile, but gave a mere assent aloud.

"Oh, it is a beautiful sight! Trying as it is to a mother's heart to witness it—knowing, as she must do, how such self-compression is the hardest task of all—still, it is a beautiful sight. It is the martyr spirit still alive. It is not dead. Oh, Miss Marnott, believe me, 'tis not the hearts that break that suffer most; 'tis those hearts that will not rupture themselves—that *will* live on, and nobly disregard the trouble that sits there. 'Tis not the eye that weeps, but that which is dry and moistureless, that bespeaks the deepest anguish. Oh, what a drought

is that! Oh, what a barren, sterile soul must that be that cannot emit if it were but one solitary tear to tell that there has been in other days some freshness, some verdure there; and that this parched and arid desert of the present is but the well-watered and fructile garden of the 'happier past'! Oh, Cécile, how are noble souls mistaken! And that which is the impress of their chivalry, the world looks reproachfully on as the seal of their indifference. To think that you—even you, Miss Marnott, with your advantages of observation—should not have discovered the secret cause of Maria's apathetic unconcern, and listless quietude! Oh, my brave child, to think that you have deceived even her who lives in the same house, and sits at the same table! Thou hast indeed within thy breast the spirit of thy race!"

As this was all declaimed as though it were one of the longer utterances of a Hamlet or a Brutus, and was followed by a pause which is usually filled up by the applause of an appreciative audience, it did not give Cécile excuse to ask what was this secret source of grief of which Mrs. Bland had hinted. Could it be true that Maria, too, was weighed down with sorrow for Mr. Lexley's accident? But why should she especially feel this, who had not been the cause of it? On the contrary, she had refused to go near the cascade when asked, and so far had un-

consciously done her best to prevent the tragedy. She, of all, should be most comforted in mind. Cécile pondered much on this, that afternoon, and on her way home.

The parsonage was not large, nor had it cost much to furnish. Everything was of the plainest; but perfectly clean, and exquisitely neat. It did not follow because Cécile's work was over at the Blands' that her day's labour was at an end. She went straight to the nursery.

"Dear aunt, I am sorry I am so late; but Clara kept me with her scales. She does not make any satisfactory progress, I fear, in her music. But I will take baby now."

"Thank you, love. I did watch for your coming; for baby is restless, and I have this pinafore to finish to-night, if possible; and it is hard to nurse and stitch at the same time."

Cécile put a plain holland apron on, and took the baby. She began to sing in a soft and cooing manner to it, and in the course of a few minutes had hushed it into a quiet sleep. Then she laid it in the cradle, and got out her needle and thread, and began to sew some buttons on her uncle's shirt for Sunday —that gentleman's proneness to get rid of buttons being something astonishing to the female minds of the parsonage.

"You look pale, dear," said Mrs. Haddock, anxiously. "You work too hard, I fear." She herself looked overworked. Her brow was yet smooth, and she herself yet young; but the lines of care were preparing there. There was a quiet look, too, of suffering on her face, which would indeed have made one sad, had it not been met and overmatched with one of tender and holy calm. Her countenance was pale; but this same sweet air of constancy lit it up with an expression that took from its pallor, and made you think rather of the placid soul that was hid beneath. Cécile always thought she saw a real light in her aunt's face, and that it took its illumination from within. It made her ponder on the faces of Moses and Stephen—the one dazzling with the external glory that came from God, the other shining softly with that same God's spirit of resignation within; and, judging by her aunt, she pictured to herself how much more tender and fair must have been the protomartyr's than the lawgiver's face. A lamp that was fed within, and oil that was replenished daily from a devotional heart; such, to Cécile, was her aunt's countenance; and it was loved and venerated as such.

"I shall never think I work hard while I look at you," said Cécile, thoughtfully. "Auntie, I do so hope this new church will be given to uncle. He deserves it; he has laboured so hard since he came

here. But Mr. Juggins says it very often happens that those who have the best claim are passed over—not so much of ill-will, or purpose even, but out of sheer ignorance. I know why he said it."

"Why, love?" asked Mrs. Haddock.

"He saw my heart was set on it, and he wished to prepare me for disappointment."

"He is a kind, good-hearted man, I believe. Joseph has met him several times. I have never seen him. I fear I am very anxious on this subject of the church. Your uncle is sadly overtasked, and has long needed a change. The parish is far too much for his strength, and he has never been able to afford a curate.

"Oh, aunt, I do so wish I could be a curate for him," said Cécile, far too seriously to laugh.

"You do your best, and that is a good deal, love. Your taking charge of the Sunday-school library has been a great relief to him. And besides, think what we should do without you at home."

"I could do so much more if I were at home all day; but I suppose the salary is of consequence, is it not?" asked Cécile.

"We could not get on without it. But that represents but a little of your value, dear. You dress the little ones in the morning, and help me with the breakfast. Then you set them their lessons, and examine them in the evening. Then you put them

to bed; and the amount of sewing you manage to accomplish while you talk them to sleep amazes even me, who am a fair sempstress."

"They are such dear little children that it is a happiness to work for them," said Cecile warmly. "I am afraid there is not much chance of my getting a larger salary next quarter."

"You think not?" said Mrs. Haddock. "Well, at the worst, the children must go without their new frocks. Poor things! it will be a great disappointment. But they will have to get used to these things, unless——"

"Unless we get the church, aunt," said Cécile, smiling. "Confess it—that was what you were going to say?"

"I cannot deny it, Cécile. You must say nothing to your uncle; but, do you know, I dream about it morning, noon, and night. It is ever in my mind as the one escape from unnumbered difficulties. It is an enchanted bag, too, that contains all I long for. If I see the children, I say to myself, 'Should Joseph be offered this living, they shall have frocks like those the young Bartletts wear.' If I look in the library and see the empty shelves, I say, 'Should this new church be given to Joseph, he shall have all those works he talks about, and a few more of my own selection, for I know exactly what he likes.' Then

he should have a nice chop every time he got home from the night-school, and the men's class, and the clothing-club."

"And what would you give yourself, aunt?" asked Cécile, caressing her hand.

"Myself! Oh, I had forgotten myself. Well, Miss Marnott, since you ask, I will tell you that there is a certain brown merino in Hackett's window which has taken my fancy much. I dare not pass that shop now. I want a dress so much, and that suits my taste so well. Should Joseph be presented to this living within the next few weeks I would buy—say twelve yards; and with the aid of the active fingers of my niece, I would look never so smart since Joseph and I met in St. Olave's Church, Brampton, nine years ago." A tear stood in her eye; but it was not a bitter one. "I have a little mystery to tell you, love."

"A mystery, aunt! That is a new thing at the parsonage, surely."

"It is. Nevertheless, one has come to us at last. Last Friday your uncle received anonymously a ten-pound note."

"For his own use?" asked Cécile, eagerly. "Oh, I am so glad. How could you keep it from me so long, auntie?"

"I did not know myself until this morning, after you had gone."

"How was that?" inquired Cécile.

"Your uncle thought there might be some mistake, and that it was Mr. Grewby's subscription that was due for the Working Men's Club; but that came in proper course this morning, and now he believes it is really for us."

"Who sent it?" questioned her niece.

"We cannot tell. This is the handwriting, and this is all it says—'For the Rev. Joseph Haddock, from an unknown friend.' Do you recognize it?"

"No. I never saw that writing before. But, aunt"—and here Cecile grew confused—"it is just possible that Mrs. Bland has sent it."

"Mrs. Bland!" cried her aunt, astonished. What makes you think so?"

"You must not be angry with me, auntie; but I asked her last Thursday for an increase of salary, and she refused—somewhat bluntly, I thought; indeed, I went upstairs and had a little cry over it. When I came down again, I found that she had had visitors. She did not tell me who they were—the Jugginses, or Skillicornes, I should say—but she had been telling them of my request."

"It was very unladylike," cried Mrs. Haddock impetuously.

"Evidently they had suggested that an increase would be welcome at the parsonage; for she said that

although she had not deemed it necessary to raise my salary at present, she would think over it in consideration of certain things she had heard relative to my uncle's difficulties."

"Difficulties! Did she say difficulties?" said Mrs. Haddock, a hectic flush on her cheeks.

"I do not think she meant it in any unkind sense. I am sure she did not," said Cécile.

"Perhaps not," said Mrs. Haddock, after a pause. "But I did not know we were talked about. I thought we had been saved that. And so you think that Mrs. Bland has been moved to send this money thus anonymously to your uncle?"

"I am inclined to think so, after what has occurred. The money came on Friday, you say, and this conversation took place on Thursday afternoon."

"The coincidence seems to point to that solution. I must confess that I would sooner it had been somebody else. But your uncle has a very high opinion of Mrs. Bland, and he has had better opportunities of judging of her character than I. He saw her again yesterday, and seemed much moved at her anxiety and solicitude respecting Mr. Lexley's state. From her account it would seem that she had just procured a rough, movable couch, when she heard that Mr. Geoffrey and your uncle were carrying him themselves. It quite unnerved her for nearly a week.

She has called herself at the Grange every day to inquire after his condition. Miss Bland, too, seems far from well, from her statement.

"She certainly is not quite like herself, just now," said Cécile, who had persistently kept her out-door troubles to herself. Well she knew that, despite twelve pounds a year, her aunt and uncle would take her away at once if she were not happy in her position as the young Blands' governess. "I suppose we shall not hear of Mr. John's state again to-night?" she asked quietly.

"No—unless Joseph should come round that way from the class. I believe the crisis is at hand. And there is the old sad and anxious doubting again, as is always the case in accidents such as his, whether, if he live, he will recover wholly or partially—that is, whether he will be incapacitated, or not. It is better you should be aware of this, love. I know full well how terrible is this time to my Cécile, and I fancy I can guess exactly the position in which you feel to stand in relation to this trouble."

Cécile threw down her work with a convulsive sob, and her aunt took her into her arms.

"Auntie, if he die, I shall have been the cause."

"That is your feeling, I know. I should be equally miserable in similar circumstances. Nevertheless, dear, it is probable that more than half of those

who die in the world die through the agency of those who held them most dear; only the fact was less apparent than in your case, as less immediate in its result. Thus the sense of personal responsibility is obscured. There are thousands of mothers who, out of sheer anxiety for the well-being of their little ones, do that for them which in the end is the cause of their being taken from them. A tender but mistaken judgment lies at the root of numberless deaths. How terrible would that be if it were criminal! But it is not so. And yet how far removed from such cases is yours! Mr. Lexley is in danger of his life from an attempt to save a fellow-creature from a manifest peril. Would you have had him do otherwise, if it had been any other than yourself? Nay, would you have had him do otherwise, although it was yourself? Better—I say it without hesitation—better he should perish than act cowardly. Better he should die in the path of duty than live on by having shirked it."

"Yes, I am glad he tried to save me," said Cécile, after a pause.

"That is right, dear. Think of his manhood, and that will solace you. Besides, while we must never tempt Providence, neither can we frustrate it; and that which seems so sad an accident to you, may be working out schemes that we poor finite creatures may not, and may never, fathom."

"Yes, aunt, I try to rest in that thought. But now you say it, I think I shall be more comforted."

After some further talk, which sensibly soothed Cécile, they put away their work, and went to the children. Having washed them, and listened to their prayers, they were tucked in their little cribs; then Cécile sat with them, stitching and singing, and then after a while they went to sleep.

"Has not uncle come in yet?" she inquired, when she came to the sitting-room, and found her aunt alone.

"No. I am getting anxious, for the supper has been on the table half an hour, and he is so punctual. He must be waiting at the Grange, I think," she said, looking at Cécile with a tender pity.

"Perhaps *he* is dead, aunt?" said Cécile in a whisper.

"I think not. I believe he will recover," responded Mrs. Haddock.

"But if he should be—be—if he should have no reason?" Cécile was deadly pale.

"Let us hope for the best, till the worst comes, love. I trust for good news. Here comes your uncle with it," she added, as his well-known step passed the window.

They did not move, and no other word was said. 'Twere hard to say which felt the most keenly—she

who awaited her sentence, as it were, or she who advocated her innocence. Mr. Haddock—perhaps he did not know how anxiously his appearance was watched for—stayed in the passage a minute or two, then came in, and the first word he said was—

"John Lexley is better."

"And his intellect?" said Mrs. Haddock, in a firm but hushed voice.

"Unscathed, thank God. I waited with them. The fact is, I feared for Geoffrey more than John. He has never had more than an hour's sleep since Saturday fortnight. As soon as the brothers had recognized one another I drew Geoffrey away, and got him to bed."

CHAPTER XVII.

"A good man ther was of religioun,
That was a poure Persone of a toun:
But riche he was of holy thought and werk
. . . . . .
Benigne he was, and wonder diligent,
And in adversitie ful patient."

Canterbury Tales.

MRS. HADDOCK told her husband what Cécile suspected in respect of the ten-pound note; and, after a little deliberation, he determined to write to Mrs. Bland a letter of thanks. He wrote as follows:—

"The Parsonage, July 14th.

"DEAR MRS. BLAND,

"From a hint dropped by a friend to Mrs. Haddock, I believe I am correct in my supposition that you are the anonymous sender of the ten-pound note received last week. I will not ask how you came to know of our great need. Sufficient for me that God has heard my prayer, and discovered a way

of escape from several pressing difficulties. To Him I render the praise. None the less am I grateful to you as a willing instrument in His hands. May it be restored a thousand-fold into your own bosom. My wife unites with me in kind regards to yourself and Miss Bland.

"Believe me, yours very faithfully,

"JOSEPH R. HADDOCK.

"P.S.—My wife desires me to add that by 'difficulties' you are not to assume that we are in debt. God be praised, we owe no man anything."

This letter was carried by Cécile the next morning; and having presented it to Mrs. Bland, she passed on into the schoolroom, and to her pupils. When her day's duties were over, she went in to say good-bye to her employer; but the widow was not in. The servant, however, gave her a note, addressed to her uncle. This she took home. Mr. Haddock read the letter as he sat at the tea-table, and, as he passed it on to his wife, said with a smile—

"Cécile was right. It was Mrs. Bland."

The letter read thus—

"MY DEAR PASTOR,

"Your short note was duly received this morning. I had never mentioned the subject to a

single friend, so how any hint could have got to you I cannot tell. I trust that the receipt of this little tribute of admiration for the zeal with which you perform the duties of your high ministration and office will give you as much pleasure as the bestowal of it has to the sender. With our united kind regards,

"I am, my dear Mr. Haddock,

"Yours most sincerely,

"EMILY BLAND.

"Will you kindly keep this little transaction a profound secret, in accordance with the original desire of the donor?"

"I like the letter very much," said the clergyman. "An evident disappointment runs through it, short as it is, that we have discovered her secret. She is a good woman, depend upon it."

"She certainly has exerted herself in your behalf," responded his wife, who felt sore vexed with herself that she was not more grateful. Never had a sum of money come more opportunely.

"Yes, it may be a mistaken act of judgment to have written to the bishop—for I suspect such letters are just the kind of thing they prefer to dispense with—nevertheless, no one can misunderstand the motive. I have an increasing regard for Mrs. Bland. I feel bound to say this; for when she first came

amongst us, I fancied there was an absence of reality about her. It only proves how careful we should be in forming our judgment upon people while they are yet strangers to us."

Mrs. Haddock still distrusted Mrs. Bland, but she did not say so. Indeed, she would have been ashamed to confess it.

"And now that the money is undoubtedly ours, what are we to do with it?" said Mr. Haddock briskly.

Cécile got up.

"Don't go, dear; we have no family secrets to hide—none at any rate that you may not know," said her aunt.

"No, indeed. What we should do without our Cécile, I cannot think. Besides, she who adds so much to our income, has a right to know how it is spent."

"The enormous sum of twelve pounds sterling, every year," said Cécile, laughing.

"Your sarcasm is a failure, my dear," said her uncle, drawing her towards him. "Twelve pounds is an enormous increase to our annual income."

"But you must remember you have me to keep—a full-grown girl, with an *enormous* appetite," replied Cécile, preserving a tone of badinage on this the one painful subject of converse in that household.

For it was the "ways and means" which had imprinted those haggard lines upon Mr. Haddock's brow. It was "ways and means" that had crippled him to some extent in his spiritual work, by preventing him giving that absolute thought to his parochial duties, which a large and increasing and poor parish demanded. But he had a brave help-meet in his wife; and her thoughtful care and unrepining fortitude had been a tower of strength to him. She it was who concealed from him on each returning night the chiefer topics that had absorbed her care by day. She it was who strove to hide under a cheerful expression that continued worry that was gnawing at her very heart. That great and momentous question, how to live, embraces physical conditions as well as spiritual; and if, as a true mother, Mrs. Haddock looked well to the latter, it was the first that had made many a night sleepless through careful calculations, and day after day pass wearily in the attempt to preserve their limits. Few outsiders knew this; for she had a proud heart; and an independent spirit went with it. Her children were cheaply clad—how cheaply, none but herself was aware—but they were always neat; and to most observers the economy that marked their dress was lost in the simple and unpretending gentility of the same. For years her little ones had been attired from her own scant ward-

robe. She rarely bought herself a dress, or rather she rarely purchased the materials wherewith to make a dress; but, oh, how everlasting seemed its wear! When she had done with it, it was cut up, and stitched into two or three frocks; from the elder it passed down to the younger ones, and then was put away for them that perchance were yet to be born. She had known nothing of this in her own childhood. She had been dandled in the lap of luxury. To pinch and save had been an unmeaning phrase to her for the first twenty years of her life. Poverty she had only seen in books, or when the carriage-wheels had brushed past some tattered applicant for the charity of the purse-proud uncle with whom, as an orphan, she lived. And yet, when he cut her off because she *would* marry the poor curate—cut her off as men have been known to sever the rope that is the drowning wretch's only chance—she cheerfully went her new way; and Joseph Haddock had never heard one single murmur cross her lips. Nay, she had never murmured unbeknown to himself. I do not say that the clergyman foresaw all this, or that he had been gifted above the average of his ordained fellows with an intuition in his selection of a help-meet. He was in love, as many another spiritually-minded man has been; and if it had been whispered to him that Charlotte Hursey would have displayed

qualities the opposite to these, I fear he would have stuck to her just the same. He knew she was good in the light of Heaven, and true as regards himself; and on the strength of this, he had wooed and led her to the altar.

"Again, I ask what is to be done with the ten pounds?" asked Mrs. Haddock gaily.

"Invest it," suggested her husband in a solemnly serious manner.

"In what?" inquired his wife.

"In three hundred weight of bread-and-butter, ten yards of bleached calico for pinafores, two green parasols, one striped petticoat, and Hooker's 'Ecclesiastical Polity,' in three volumes. This will give a fair share to each, I think," said the parson.

"What do you suggest, Cécile?" asked Mrs. Haddock, preserving a grave tone.

"You say you are not in debt?" questioned her niece.

"Not in absolute and actual debt. That is, I have money to pay my bills; but when paid, my exchequer is empty, literally empty."

"Still you are not in debt?" re-questioned Cécile.

"No," replied her aunt with affected wrath. "I wonder how you dare ask such a question. We have never been in debt."

"The money is yours, uncle, is it not?"

"Undoubtedly. It was for 'The Rev. Joseph Haddock.' Charlotte is not mentioned. It is possible the donor is not aware of her existence — always supposing we don't know who sent it."

"Then, uncle, we will thrust auntie altogether out of our councils. I have a plan for the expenditure of that money, but it can only be carried out in her absence."

"Woman, depart—avaunt thee!" said the parson, rising and waving his hand theatrically toward the door.

It was impossible for Mrs. Haddock to get them to listen calmly to her. She had got a list of desirable purchases which would have absorbed nine pounds, nineteen and sixpence-halfpenny exactly. The children were to have a penny each—and baby the extra moiety—for their own spending. She had carefully set down each article on paper; and as we have a key, which our readers have not, which fits the exact drawer upstairs, wherein this little but important document is kept, we will inform them at once that no one was forgotten but herself. She had something in store for all; even a print dress for their own maid in the kitchen. Her own share was to have been the pleasure of buying and presenting her purchases. No uninitiated person could have believed how far that ten-pound note was to have gone. India-

rubber is incomparably less elastic than that peculiar paper of which bank-notes are made, if it only get into well-apprenticed hands; and Mrs. Haddock, by long practice and native ability, could stretch and stretch till the wonder was how such thin material could possibly hold together. But she was not to have her own way this time. To her great dismay she was seized by her husband, and marshalled to the door. Nor would Cécile help her. On the contrary, she, in the basest manner, aided and abetted her uncle in his rebellion; and the key was turned upon her and her precious document.

"What shall we buy her, Cécile?" asked Mr. Haddock, so soon as they had seated themselves on the sofa.

The banging at the door was tremendous; but they were inexorably deaf, and plotted on in whispers.

"Shall it be a silk dress—or merino, with a bonnet and cape in addition?" inquired Cécile.

"I think quantity is better than quality, if the axiom be accepted in moderation," replied her uncle wisely. "Let us go in for the merino, with those other appendages you hinted at. But we must let the children have something. She will never forgive us if they are left out. What shall it be?"

"Summer hats, with some gloves and ribbons," suggested Cécile.

"Very well. But nothing more. It will take away the suspicion that we have no idea of domestic economy. And now about the rest."

"The rest, uncle?" said Cécile, laughing.

"Yes, love, the rest," said Mr. Haddock, innocently.

"There will be nothing left after that is all done," said Cécile.

"Then you must dock off something. Let it be the gloves and ribbons; for I am determined that we shall all have a nice trip into the country—say to Garsington Abbey. We will hire that long, straggling conveyance of Tomkinsons', and make a day of it. If we make up the lunch and tea at home, there will be nothing dreadfully expensive in it, except the bill at the stables."

"Oh, uncle, what a delicious idea! And when shall it be?"

"Next Friday. Your holidays begin at the Blands on Tuesday, do they not?"

"Yes. I am so glad it is so soon. We should not be able to live if we had to wait longer. It will be hard to keep up till Friday. Hadn't we better hide it from Bobbie for a few days?" said Cécile, kissing her uncle.

"Oh, dear me—no. That young man could exist into the next century if you promised him a chance

of breaking his neck in the year 1901. Of course, he'll be somewhat excited and demonstrative; but really, my dear Cécile, when is he otherwise?"

Mrs. Haddock was as curious as her sex is reported to be, and had never left the door. She had placed her ear at the keyhole and listened, but to no purpose. She had heard nothing. Therefore about this time she had begun a second performance of the tattoo. No sooner was the door opened than she burst in, and, after a vain attempt to box her husband's ears, seized upon Cécile, and demanded with severe sarcasm—

"Well, and how is the money to be wasted, pray?"

But the two kept their council, and nothing could be got out of them.

"Cécile, you shall suffer for this," said her aunt, laughing.

That evening, for the first time since the accident, Geoffrey came to the parsonage. He looked wan, but a radiant gladness overspread his face as he shook each one warmly by the hand, and assured them that the doctor reported all danger to be over for the present.

"Who do you think has been most frequent in his inquiries after Johnnie during the last week?" he said, after they had recapitulated—as people in such

a case love to do—the main features and incidents of the visit to the falls.

"As it is some one out of the common way," said the parson, "I shall suggest Grimes, the innkeeper, who was so kind in running on in advance to the Grange to prepare them for our coming."

"He has been twice. But I was not referring to him. No; our most constant visitor has been Isaac Curling. He has been twice a day ever since he heard of the accident. He has not seen much of Johnnie of late—he has been away from home. I wonder what on earth can have taken him away for so long a time."

"He is a curiosity collector; and those fellows will go to the very ends of the earth for a rusty corselet or a falchion that some one or other of renown has wielded," said Mr. Haddock.

"It struck me that might be the case," responded Geoffrey. "He and Johnnie are very chummy on those subjects. But I had no idea that he had such a liking for my brother. He wore a most serious look on his face whenever he came, and watched for a change with the deepest solicitude. The odd part is that he seemed most really subdued when he heard of the turn for the better. When I told him of it this morning, on my way to the mill—my first visit after many a long day—he gave me a look of the deepest

concern, as though I had been informing him that the worst had happened."

"He is a strange fellow. If it had not been your brother who was the subject of your conversation, I should say that he was not really listening to you, and that he was thinking of some advertised antique cabinet, or oaken chair, that he could not muster money enough to buy. He did not ask you to lend him any money?" asked the clergyman.

"No. Johnnie has helped him in that way at various times. I believe he took in the fact as I related it to him. I fancy he was overcome by the good news, and has a way of his own of showing emotion."

"The fashion of some bygone age," suggested Mrs. Haddock, smiling; "the antique of sensibility."

"Possibly," assented Geoffrey. "I prefer the modern."

The young man chatted with Mr. Haddock for some time after this, while the ladies went to their duties in the schoolroom and nursery. They strolled out upon the little lawn that lay to the rear of the parsonage, surrounded with a dead wall, overtopped with roofs and chimneys. But there was a nice patch of blue sky above. And Cécile had cultivated some flowers at their feet. Creepers, too, were growing up the house-wall, and not a few signs were there to show that in course of time something like a garden might

emerge out of these little beginnings. As the twilight closed in, Geoffrey must needs stay supper, and prayers; and he had time to talk to Cécile, and listen to her music; and by the time the late stars were shining in the summer sky, he left the Haddocks, and walked homewards in a profound meditation. He did not look unhappy. On the contrary, a flush was on his cheek, and a light in his eye, which seemed to betoken the outward expression of some inner joy. What was the subject of his thoughts it might have been hard to say. But once he stopped, and, looking at a belated crow, he addressed it thus—

"Cécile—yes, it is a pretty name."

Nor was this his only ejaculation. As he proceeded through the streets he paused to look upon a new house, somewhat superior in size and aspect to those around it. A few more days would complete it. It was such a house as the manager of a mill, or a head-clerk, might have selected for his home.

"This would be admirably suited for us. Just between the two houses."

It seems too bad to play the eaves-dropper. Yet, if young men will talk aloud in their nightly ramblings, 'tis hard that we must put our fingers in our ears. And I will vouch that, just as Geoffrey Lexley turned the latch of his father's garden-gate, he said, with marked and solemn deliberation—

"I am sure Johnnie likes her, and would love her as a sister. I will wait a few days, till he is really recovered; then I will speak to him, and see Mr. Haddock."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Between those heights,
And on the top of either pinnacle,
More keenly than elsewhere in night's blue vault,
Sparkle the stars, as of their station proud."

ONE morning, in the high summer, Isaac Curling gat him up early, and dressed himself with more than professional care. He did not meet Mr. Skillicorne in the street, as he passed into the highway leading to Brampton, or there is no doubt that with that gentleman he might have come to words.

Isaac was not on foot, but in a low, dingy vehicle, of a nondescript style, which he had unearthed from the posting stables. The spring had sunk or collapsed in some mysterious manner, the consequence being that the body of the trap bellied downwards. Should any big stone lie in the way, it must assuredly come in contact therewith; and the result, seeing that stone is harder than wood, was in favour of the stone. In the *mêlée* flesh might suffer.

"Keep 'im i' th' middle o' th' road," shouted John Stableman.

"Dodge round th' pebbles," screamed Bill Stableboy.

Mr. Curling did not know very much about driving, or horses, or carriages, but he instinctively felt that he sate extremely low. He could only see the pony's mane over the fore-frame of his vehicle. As for roadside obstacles, he might as well have attempted to descry the Rocky Mountains themselves. They were out of his horizon altogether.

The morning was beautiful, the air soft and blowing deliciously cool, as a set-off against the warm shafts of light that came from his rear. He was driving westwards, through a valley, sometimes shallow, sometimes deep. The road was raised above the bed of the stream, and wound its way at an elevation of some thirty or forty feet upon the hillside. Thus the view was extended ; and as there was nothing to see but what was fair, it was accounted a pleasant road to ramble along, even by those who were not enthusiasts in matters of this kind. The hedgerows were thick with wild flowers, red, white, and purple-blue, and all steeped in morning dew, as though they had come fresh from a dip-bath in the purling stream below, before they set themselves to their daily duty of looking purity in the face of man. Elms and

beeches of shining copper, with here and there a gnarled oak, threw fantastic shadows upon the white limestone way. Upon one side or another in the occasional declivities, a little hurst of fir-trees, with bobs as thick as plums, and still denser underwood beneath, would show darkly, in despite of the streaming flood of gold that illumined all else. The prattle of the stream upon the pebbles could be faintly caught, and what was lacking of fulness and breadth in its music was filled up with the mellowed concert of many birds, each with his different pipe.

Even Isaac was not impervious to such sights and sounds. "Brasses, an' registers, an' epitaphs, an' tombstones, is, no doubt, given by God for enjoyment; but it's good to lift one's eyes a' times, and woppen (open) one's ears. The earth's fair, though it's under th' curse. Maybe we shall see better up yonder"—and he gazed into the blue—"and be wanting summat more. But it'll do for th' present—thank God for His mercies." Isaac always thought in the dialect.

He sped gently along, and muttered, as he passed on amid other and varying beauties, "I mun think more o' these things."

And now the genealogist began to ascend, and all grew wilder, and less animate. Beauty gave place to untamed grandeur; for the hills were beginning to gather themselves precipitously together. A phalanx

of hard rock obstructed his path in the distance. He had turned into an arm of the valley, and this arm reached higher and higher, swiftly narrowing itself, till it was lost in the jagged ridges of the mountain-top. Even the brown heather disappeared—there was not a pinch of earth for it to grow upon. Steeper grew the way ; less marked the path. Jolt succeeded jolt ; and but for the slow pace of his nag, Isaac might have been pitched on *terra firma*, or *terra firmissima*, for it was all boulder. This would have been unpleasant indeed. Isaac was bony, and had little flesh to make a cushion of, and break the fall. When the summit was reached, he had to go round a *comb*. A tilt into this cup-shaped depression would have been fatal. Boulders, large and small, like bleached bones, could be seen at the bottom, which, during many generations—one had almost said dispensations—had been loosened, and then hurled by gravitatory laws into the hollow below. Isaac shivered. He had no wish to prove that this law held good of man as well as stones, so he got out of his tumbril and walked at his nag's head. But the air was gloriously free, and all below, albeit they were the works of God, seemed steeped in littleness.

And now awe came over him. There was nothing above him—he was against the sky. About him huge shafts of granite reared themselves perpendicularly—

the sentinels of ages. He stood on a platform of precipitate crags. A hard and grey and unrelenting grandeur ruled all.

"God A'mighty is stern at times," he muttered, timorously. "I mun think o' these things."

But he recovered himself speedily, for a sharp descent lay before him. As his pony trudged down, his spirits rose up. By degrees the grey, untilled common began to disappear; the whinny gorse showed itself at intervals, then clumps of furze, then hedgerows and flowers, and cultivated fields. Half a mile away he could see the lone farm-house whither his purpose had led him. There he knew dwelt the Kilverts, and there he knew Kilverts had dwelt for generations, in calm disdain of all that affected the outer world. What tales were told in laughter to hide the feeling of superstition that overhung them! The land was their own; but no one could discover whether they ever paid taxes, or who collected them. Tradition alone asserted that the post-carrier had gone that way, and nobody would have backed his statement for a gill of twopenny ale. They were seldom at market, and then it was the tall wife, not the husband, who appeared. If he came she was with him. How the world wagged they never asked. They sold their sheep, or bought their turnips, as the case might be, and went their way into the hills again.

Isaac did not know that he had ever seen either the farmer, or the farmeress; but he understood, with the rest of Lackington, that this pair were ignorant of contemporary history. He was a firm believer in the miller's story, who was wont to relate that when in a jocular frame he announced gravely to Kilvert, the husband, the fact that "Queen Anne was dead," the other replied, with a faint flicker of interest, "Ah, well, poor thing, she's better off now, though she was queen. There's one more place filled i' glory."

Isaac was thinking of this story, and wondering what likelihood there was of his receiving any satisfactory replies to the questions he had come to ask, when his steed gave a start, as a big bird "whirred" out of a furze-bush at his very nose. Then he plunged forward in mad career. The vehicle rattled and shivered over the stony track, and rattled and shivered the genealogist with it, till he was almost convinced that it was his own bones that were making all the noise. For full five minutes this went on, and then his alarm ceased, for every yard found the pathway more turfy and soft. The jolting decreased in violence, and gave way to a swaying motion, which made Mr. Curling think what being on the sea might be like. The farm-yard was open. Some geese and a troop of goslings were routed triumphantly as they neared the gate. A huge sow started the pony.

He sprang aside. The sow ran in between legs and wheels—scotched the depressed belly of the vehicle, and was the unconscious means of pitching Isaac with unerring accuracy into the turbid duck-pool at his right hand.

"What may your business be *there?*" cried a testy voice, as if Isaac were gone in on purpose to grope for duck's eggs.

"Mrs. Kilvert, I presume?" said Isaac, scrambling out, and trying to look professional. The Lord Chancellor couldn't have done it under like circumstances—and we are the creatures of circumstance.

"You may presume so far, certainly," said Mrs. Kilvert, grimly.

What a hard-featured woman she was; and what a hard, dry, caustic voice she had—like a shrill October wind driving round the sternest crag at the hill-top, Isaac thought. She stood with her arms a-kimbo, and her elbows gave one the idea that they were made of cast-iron.

"Might I see your husband?"

"Certainly not." Cool, short, and decisive. It made Isaac think of chopping a carrot's head off with a cleaver.

"I've come to—to—— It will only take two minutes."

"All the better."

"I wish to put—to advance, that is—pro—propound certain inquiries."

"'Put' is better. Never use Latin, if Saxon will do."

Isaac stared confounded. He floundered yet more.

"I come in a professional capacity."

"Your professional capacity should make you more explicit. We'd a man here yesterday in the professional capacity of a beggar; and one last winter in the professional capacity of a tinker; and the winter before we had three in the professional capacity of burglars." She eyed him still more grimly. "What may *your* professional capacity be?"

Isaac's trousers-legs were dripping mud. "I wish I was at home again," he thought. He plucked up his courage—which had shrunk down below the bottom button of his waistcoat—and gripping it as firmly as he could, said, "I belong to the law!"—law, of course, pronounced with a capital.

"So does a thief when he's caught. You've been more lucky."

"I trace out genealogies, and family secrets," said Isaac, desperately.

The woman before him started. Her eyes flashed fire. Suddenly turning on her visitor, she nipped him by the arm so tightly that he winced. "This way, if you please," she said; and led, or we might say

haled, him into a small room to the left side of the porch. From this smaller room, which was a kind of ante-room, she conducted him into a large chamber, dark with age, leaden panes, wainscot, black but not dingy furniture, carved into figures of impossible animals, with impossible grimaces. The chimney-piece was seven feet high, pillared with oak. Several faces looked out of their dead gold frames, and scowled on him. Mrs. Kilvert shut the door, locked it. What a heavy bolt it had! Isaac felt as if that key had turned on him eternally. Then she placed a chair by Isaac, implying that he was to sit on it He did so. She took another chair, and sat exactly opposite to him. Her face almost touched his—her face full of stern equalities, hard regularities. Isaac shuddered visibly. "Now," she said, with quiet but terrible deliberation, "tell me what you meant when you said that you traced out family secrets." Calm as she was, a livid passion slightly swelled her face, and made the veins stand out.

"Nothing particular, I assure you," he quavered.

"Nothing particular has brought you all this way, eh?" The tone was severely contemptuous.

"It was about—about Mrs. Banyer."

"James's widow?"

"Yes, yes. I saw him on his death-bed. He said as he'd a secret."

"He told it you?" Isaac could see the blood coursing in the veins of her forehead.

"No," he said eagerly. He was awfully scared.

She looked at him for full a minute, her face nine inches from his. Her brow relaxed; she seemed relieved.

"You do not know the secret," she said, quietly.

"Then there is one?"

"Undoubtedly," she replied—and all her passion was gone. She was cool, and perfectly self-possessed again.

Isaac was a child by this woman. His worldly wisdom, if he had any, was gone. "I know this much, that it concerns Catharine Banyer."

"Catharine Banyer?" said Mrs. Kilvert, slowly, and with a shade of inquiry in her tone. She surveyed Isaac's face for an instant, then the slightest symptom of a smile appeared at the corner of her mouth. "I did not know you had got so far on the trail as that."

"Oh yes. He told me that much. He said it concerned Catharine. And Mrs. Banyer says that he used to say that he had a secret that would put her in satin and laces some day."

"He did, did he! And he never told Mrs. Banyer what this secret was?" she asked, gravely.

"No. She is very anxious to know, poor thing!

She said she thought you could tell," Isaac added, with a slight flash of hope.

"You are quite right. There is a secret. It concerns Mrs. Banyer; and I could tell it you now," Mrs. Kilvert replied very deliberately, after a pause.

"Will you?" cried Isaac, eagerly.

"No—that is, not yet. There are circumstances that demand the most extreme caution on my part, and on yours." She smiled confidingly.

Isaac felt sensibly flattered. She was going to give him a share in the matter, after all. What a fine woman she looked, when you had got over the hard expression! How well she spoke!—not a trace of dialect—and with that inexpressible something in the intonation that made the genealogist, unlearned on such points as he was, recognize high breeding, if not high birth. Isaac knew instinctively that only a mystery could account for such a woman holding such a position in such a place. He was well acquainted with the Kilvert pedigree; but where the present representative had got his wife he did not know. He felt curious, but he did not dare to broach the question. He was only just beginning to recover himself, as it was. The tremor of fear yet lingered in the region of his boots. She was a handsome, but at the same time an awful, woman.

"Does your husband know anything?"

"No." She glanced at him. Then softened again—that is, her features relaxed—there could be no actual softening of her face. "What is your name?"

"Isaac Curling."

"Of Lackington?"

"Yes; formerly clerk of the parish church."

"Well, Mr. Curling, let me give you a piece of advice. You would like to be participator of this secret?"

"Yes."

"For Catharine Banyer's sake?"

Isaac blushed slightly. "Yes. Banyer reposed the confidence in me. Besides, I am interested in my professional cap——I mean, from a student point of view." Mrs. Kilvert smiled at his confusion.

"Well, I will give you a piece of advice. You must never speak to my husband on the subject. You must hint nothing to any living soul in Lackington—not even to Mrs. Banyer; and in the mean time you must carefully note down on paper all the registrations of Catharine's family to be found in the parish books, or elsewhere. After that I will see you again."

Isaac's eyes gleamed. "I will do so at once."

"Don't hurry. You must be very careful. Especially be cautious"—she placed her hand on his arm; her voice was low, almost a whisper—"in relation to the marriages of the family."

The genealogist felt duly impressed. He promised the utmost particularity in respect of the marriages. He was quite radiant. This was in his line indeed.

"You will take some lunch before you return?" She did not wait for answer, and led Isaac into an apartment across the passage—spacious, but simply furnished.

While she prepared, he had time to examine her and the room. There was an air of refinement in both. Not that there was anything *recherché* or modern in the furniture. But there was a large cabinet filled with books, many, as he saw, with a foreign title; and here and there lay the little embellishments and instruments of a cultivated and elegant mind. The chamber itself was cheerful, with a bright outlook, and many flowers skilfully trained peeped in and out of the open trellised window. As for herself, Mrs. Kilvert was tall, with a stern regularity of features, which sadly lacked in softening lines. And yet a smile would have done much for that face; and there was a remnant of tenderness in her eye, which made one feel that sweetness was only an outcast there, not an alien. Her hair was smooth, and smoothly laid—not plaited, simply tied behind. Her neck was faultless in its curve; her figure full, somewhat luxurious, and her dress fell from her insensibly into folds

of nicest neatness; for I need hardly say some women cannot help looking neat, and their praise is unwon. She was one who might have loved, and have been loved, ere painful influences had absorbed all feeling from her face.

Isaac took in as much as his nature was capable of taking in such a woman, and blushed to find her waiting upon him like a menial. Cold mutton from the larder, home-brewed ale, a home-baked quartern, and a clean white napkin, were quickly before him, and the latter was but one more token to the genealogist that he was eating in the presence of one who, shut up in the hills as she was, had known the world from a higher platform than he.

He ate confusedly, and was relieved to bid her good-day, without so much as an attempt at a professional bow.

"Don't hurry about the registers. Don't speak to my sister-in-law, and I will see you again."

Isaac looked obedience, and departed.

He passed out of the yard, and had reached the whin-bushes cut upon the common, when he espied a man lurking by a stone parapet that sheltered the cattle from a small but sudden declivity. As he approached, the stranger came forward. He seemed a farm-labourer. His face was coarsely grained, and somewhat blotched, and he wore a smock.

"You've stayed a pretty time there," he said.

"Not by appointment, anyway," replied Isaac; "though I don't see why it can concern you. Your mistress can care for herself, I reckon."

The other laughed somewhat bitterly. "Yes, she can do that, and most other things likewise. "What did you talk about?"

"Business," said the other curtly. "Rather cool, this," he thought. He had insensibly stopped his vehicle.

"You haven't a sup o' drink about you?" asked the other somewhat sharply. He did not seem at all curious as to the nature of the business.

"No."

"No beer?"

"No."

"Nor spirits?"

"No."

"Not a drop of anything?"

"Not a drop."

"I'm sorry to hear it. Good morning." He turned aside.

At the same moment Isaac heard a blow struck, and looking round, was in time to see Mrs. Kilvert with her hard knuckles in the neckcloth of the labourer.

"What have you to do with this gentleman?"

"I only wished him Good morning, Terry," gasped the other, looking extremely frightened.

"Only wished him 'Good morning.' I suppose you only wished James 'Good morning,' when I caught you and him in the brew-house? I happen to know what took place there. You *told him*. If I were not your wife, I would flog you."

"I was drunk, Terry," he said, in abject fright.

"You'll have nothing to drink for a fortnight. You can go, sir," she said to Isaac.

The genealogist waited for no second bidding. As he journeyed home, one thought, and one only, pervaded his mind. How came it to pass that this woman was married to such a man? It was utterly inexplicable. It was his food for reflection several days, and then by slow degrees other thoughts claimed entry, and the wonderment wore off.

In the mean time, he set earnestly to work. Much of his time was spent in the vestry of the parish church; and from the number of entries he made in his note-book, it was evident he had found much material for the task that had been set him. All this time he carefully abstained from visiting Mrs. Claypoll, and not even to Johnnie did he speak of his journey into the hills.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Is't possible that, on so little acquaintance, you should like her?"
As You Like It.

MR. EBENEZER EMLOTT had, of course, not been an impassive spectator of the event which had filled Lexley Grange with anxiety for so many days past. It had interested him much. To a certain extent, too, it had caused him anxiety. Should Johnnie die —and there were moments when Mr. Emlott wished he might die—he was determined that, if Geoffrey succeeded to the estate, he would try to get the Lexley mill into his own and Ben's hands. Geoffrey, he was sure, did not care at heart for business. When I say that there were times when the deacon looked for John Lexley's death, let us not seem to be making that gentleman all bad. Heirs at all times—that is, ever since there was property to descend, and heirs to succeed—have had to face one unpleasant drawback to their prosperity. They stand in the way of another

man's good fortune. Theirs is the life which oftentimes separates a poor man from affluence and wealth. Without falling back upon our personal observation, we know well from history that the profoundest feelings of sorrow for the dead have not always distinguished him who has succeeded to the deceased one's property. Mr. Emlott was not Johnnie's successor, but none the less did he feel an interest similar to that which would have touched him if he were. Ben was to be the founder of his family. Ben was to give up the Lexleys and be his own; and if Geoffrey became heir to the Grange, he was fully determined that the two business concerns —his own and Mr. Ralph Lexley's—should be united into one property and apportioned to Ben. Thus his younger nephew, his own heir, would have a double start. Above all, the Emlott interest would flourish at the expense of the Lexley. This was better than to seek his brother-in-law's ruin. To have thrown the Lexley mill profits into the depths of the sea would have pleased him, but to drop it into his own pocket would please him better. Before this accident happened he would have felt satisfied had Mr. Lexley lost the money in the ordinary way of bad business; but now that he saw a chance of honestly purloining it, so to say, and adding it to his own coffers, he was still more satisfied. Thus it arose that he viewed

Johnnie Lexley's possible and probable death with feelings far from poignant or painful.

But there was another matter which was exercising the mind of the deacon. He was not sure—not quite positive—but he thought he was in love, and with Mrs. Bland. A subject so mistrusted by him in the past could not but have its perplexities. But there was no doubt about one thing—that lady had fascinated him in a wondrous manner. Her selection of himself to take her in to supper at the late party had made a marked impression upon him. It had touched his weak part. He had thought about this at least once every day, and his pleasure was increased when he reflected that she, who had thus singled him out, possessed the manners of finished society. She had not been long in Lackington ; but every one knew her to be a full-blown flower of the world's most fashionable *parterre*. Mr. Emlott had no desire to oust Ben from the place in which he himself had set him. On the contrary, he wished that he should keep it. The deacon was not anxious to be the father of a family, even though an heir—actually his very own, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh—should be the consequence. He dreaded, and had ever dreaded, the idea of a nursery, and squealing babies, and midnight wanderings in search of bottles of soothing syrup. He was essentially a selfish man, and he had a

peculiar relish for a sound and undisturbed slumber. Ben met his natural disposition exactly. Putting aside his characteristics, which were after his own heart, he had in him a ready-made heir—an heir past all childish complaints, and everything that was objectionable in babyhood. He had cut his teeth, and learnt to keep out of the way when he was not wanted. No, Mr. Emlott had no desire to oust Ben from the position to which he had elected him. He should take his uncle's name, and by that means the line of succession should be carried on, and the memory of the family's founder maintained. Yes, that Mrs. Bland was well advanced in middle age, was in itself a comfortable thought to the deacon.

As is the case with nineteen elderly bachelors out of twenty, Ebenezer Emlott was hipped about himself. He had a constant and growing impression that there was something wrong with his liver. On this subject he was daily becoming more and more morbidly nervous. Whatever ailment troubled him had its origin in his liver. Even his bad circulation, from his own point of view, was but the secondary symptom of a deranged liver. That a man may think himself into any specific disease on which he has set his fears, I cannot doubt; and I think it probable that by this time Mr. Emlott had really got the complaint he dreaded. Being thus hypochon-

driacal, he had come to have strange notions about these things. He had a fixed impression, for one thing, that, except he were actively moving about in the discharge of his work, the current of his blood became utterly stagnant; a marsh-pit could not be more thick and torpid. Thus it was that towards evening, when his labours were over, he always began to get low. He never liked to stay long in one position. He would move from chair to chair, carrying with him that extra glass of port which his doctor had recommended him, merely for the sake of moving, believing thereby that he set the circulation going again. To judge by his own feelings, his circulation must have been very much like the circulation of a newspaper—say "the largest circulation in the world"—brisk in the morning, but sluggish as the day began to close. Sometimes he would get up and walk the length of the dining-room so many stated times. Sometimes he would roll up his sleeves or his trousers-leg, and fall to rubbing with great vigour his arm or his calves. But latterly he had ceased this second device, for his new London footman had caught him at it, and he fancied he had seen a smile lurking in his eye. Evidently this was not the "ton" of society. His favourite practice, however, was the one already hinted at, to move from chair to chair. This had become so habitual that not even the dread of his

footman (and never man was in such bondage, neck and crop, to his fellow-creature as Ebenezer Emlott to Tomkins) could prevent him from sliding from one seat to another until he had performed a complete rotation of the table, and found himself in the place whither he had set forth on such a remarkable journey. Nevertheless, if Tomkins had his laugh, he had also his troubles. As he said downstairs, he might as well serve the whole twelve guests at once as "master," for he had to sweep the crumbs from the whole table, and he had all the chairs to set.

When Ebenezer had adopted Ben as his partner, he had given out clearly that it was his wish that his nephew should be adopted as his son also. He must live with him. Jane, with many tears, had assented. She knew that it was for her sister's child's advantage. He would not be far from her. He would be under the peculiarly good influences of her brother. No fear that he would not be in his place at chapel. No fear that he would acquire careless habits in respect of his outward religious duties. Apart, too, from his spiritual good, he was to be her brother's heir; and Jane knew, as well as most women, that money means influence with, and respect at the hands of, men, and she was just enough a woman of the world to recognize and be sensible that this was not a thing to be scouted. Thus his uncle had taken Ben to his

house. He had not done this thoughtlessly. He was determined that Ben should be useful to himself. It should not be altogether a one-sided bargain. Of course Ben could never possibly repay the debt of gratitude he owed him for his new prospects, but he should do something towards it. He should be his companion of an evening, and, as his companion, should read or talk him out of his morbid depression. Occasionally, too, when he was well assured that Tomkins was out of the way, his nephew should rub his leg and arm a bit, towards the shoulder, or with steadily-applied friction rouse into renewed vitality the deadly-liveliness of his flaccid calves. But, alas! his experiences soon began to crush his hopes in that quarter. Ben was a poor talker and a good eater. That the mouth was but the antechamber to the throat, that the throat led to the gastric juices, and that it was very desirable to be guided thither, was evidently the sum total of his philosophy respecting that portion of the human system. His conversation, too, when he did talk, was not of a refreshing or elevating kind. There was nothing suggestive in it; nothing to draw out more than one avuncular response—sometimes not even that; nothing to contradict, unless you told a lie, which Ebenezer could not well do, being a deacon.

"Can't you say something, Ben?" he would ask

in a tone of peevish ill-humour, as he made his way to the second chair, bearing his wine with him.

"Oh, yes, uncle—certainly." Then a pause would take place. "Good nuts, these, uncle"—crunch—"capital"—crunch, crunch.

"I like them with a pinch of salt. They've a husky, dry taste without salt," the uncle would reply, sliding into the third chair. Now that his nephew faced him at the other end, it was his wont, when he had reached the length of the table, to retreat down the same side.

"So they have. I never thought of that. I'll take some at once," would answer the obsequious lad. "Very good, indeed, upon my word"—crunch, crunch.

This style of thing, of course, would never do for a liver complaint and a stagnant pulse. If Ben would not, or could not, talk, he could work, and he should work. Thus it arose that occasionally it was that young man's duty—let us hope it was his delight also—to manipulate in the afore-mentioned fashion on his uncle's upper and nether limbs.

Once more the deacon was set thinking about his liver and his stagnant blood. Ben was like to prove a failure in this matter at least. Rub his uncle, and rub him steadily for from fifteen to twenty minutes every evening, he was determined he should; but how to get rid of these depressing thoughts, that was *the rub*

of all. And now his thoughts began habitually to wander in the direction of Westbourne Villa, and Mrs. Bland. When he had recommended, or rather ordered, Ben to fall in love with Maria Bland, the thought had flashed across his mind, why not try and win the widow for himself? It is more than probable that the deacon would not have entertained much hope had it not been for Mrs. Bland's marked attentions to himself at her late party. She had passed over Mr. Skillicorne, the representative of the oldest firm of attorneys in Lackington—or, for the matter of that, in the northern portion of the county. She had passed over Mr. Juggins, which, had Ebenezer been wiser, he would have recognized as a rude act of discourtesy to that gentleman and his office; and she had said, in the most graceful of attitudes, and with the most winning of smiles, that she was afraid she must burden him with herself for an hour, if he could submit to such an infliction for so long a time. Mr. Emlott could not get rid of this remembrance; it had fed his pride and nourished his ambition to a wonderful extent. He was already rich. Why should he not be more? Why should he not obtain a place in society? With Mrs. Bland beside him, he felt as if he could do anything, and go anywhere. She, too, had money, and it could be added to his own; or, if she had more than he, he could add his to hers.

But that she was a lady of fashion, that her manners were genteel, that she had style and bearing, that she knew all the secret ways of polished living, this was that which made Mrs. Bland so valuable a possession in the eyes of Ebenezer Emlott ; and about this time he began to scheme and plan how he might secure her. I say about this time, because that secondary reason, hinted at above, began to make itself manifest. Mrs. Bland could rid him of the doldrums—of that he was certain.

If Mrs. Bland married him, the deacon felt that a great change would have to pass over him and his ways—not at the mill, but at home. And change might do him good. He would have to begin giving dinner-parties, and going out to them. He would have to commence a more active part in relation to his domestic life. He would have to begin thinking more about his dress—what he should put on, and wherewithal he should be clothed. He would have to be more careful of his greenhouse, and see that his stove pipes were kept of equal temperature, and his grapes inferior to none in the neighbourhood. It might come to pass that in some not distant day Mr. Grewby himself might be persuaded to dine with him—for what could not Mrs. Bland accomplish for him ?—and then he must have a cluster ready for the table which Mr. Grewby should mistake for one out

of his own vinery. His wine he was not anxious about—there he was all right. Every one knew that he had the best port going. Here he was himself. Howsoever nervous he might be during the earlier part of the dinner hour, and amid the quick-changing courses, he could not say; but once let the ladies withdraw, and the port be brought into prominence, and he felt that he, Ebenezer Emlott, was ready to meet a prince of royal blood himself on the most easy footing. The deacon was an ambitious man. He had gained his deaconship at the chapel as the result of ambition. Having saved his money, he had bought an old mill, and made it into a new one, solely from ambitious motives. Here he had spent the middle years of his life. He had reached it early, he had left it late; but it was ambition that had roused him at dawn, and that had caused him to linger in his office till dark had absolutely set in. His wealth had increased fast, and money had accumulated through his ambition. Many a man's ambition would have let him rest here, but not so with Mr. Emlott's ambition. It was ever teasing him with a view of the heights above him, rather than soothing him with a retrospect of those he had already scaled. It would not let him look back; it kept his eye persistently frontwards. It was ever whispering in his ear, "Ebenezer Emlott, you have not done badly, but it is as nothing

to what is to come. You must get into society, man. What is money without rank? What is gold unless it buy for you that which birth and breeding secure for other people—a place among the *élite?*" It is just possible that ambition—for nothing is an unmixed good—had given Ebenezer his bad liver; and as ambition should really quicken the circulation, we can but conclude that it had so over-stimulated it beyond what is an average and healthy flow, that the after sluggishness was but a counterbalancing and necessary process. The marriage, with its many consequences, Ebenezer thought, would be the very thing for him; it would prevent him harbouring morbid ideas about himself; it would pre-occupy his mind; it would give a fresh tone to his habits; it would introduce him into unaccustomed life; in a word, for aught he knew, it might cure him. At the same time, it was meeting his ambitious spirit.

But how was he to persuade Mrs. Bland into a matrimonial alliance with such a one as himself? How was he to induce one who was all gentility, and refinement, and sensibility, to associate herself with him—who, while surrounded with the accessories of wealth, was unskilled in the use of them? That she could change him into one like unto herself he felt sure, but how could she be moved to attempt the task? What had he to allure her to his home? He looked

round him, and so far he was satisfied. He had, at least, a comfortable and well-furnished house to offer her. The fact was, Mr. Emlott had only but a few weeks ago entered into it. Externally, it lacked but one important feature—the picturesque; but the owner did not know it, so that was no fault in his eyes. In front it had four bow windows, with Venetian blinds; above, four chimneys. The windows were of a size, so were the chimneys. The outline of the building was a solid square. It was an objection to the house that it persisted in reminding you of Euclid. It consisted, or seemed to consist, of straight lines running rectangularly. As you gazed at it you insensibly fell back upon your school-days, and began to repeat long-forgotten definitions, and axioms, and postulates of the deceased Greek already alluded to. Such a prospect from an examination-room window, would have saved many a young man from ruin—we refer, of course, to scholastic ruin, not moral —though, indeed, if he had followed the direction of the lines before him, he must have kept straight all the days of his life. It had a suspicion of looking like a huge chest of drawers, or a model dove-cote on an enlarged scale. But Ebenezer and his architect, a new and local man, were very proud of it. The architect himself was never tired of looking at it, and would often spend his evening in standing at various

angles at the front to take in the effect. He was still young, and his biography, if written, would have been useful as an example of perseverance under difficulties. He had begun life as a maker of mouse and rat traps, which he hawked about the neighbourhood. From this he had settled down to carpentering in a serious way, and had been engaged to construct a back-yard and kennel for the Grewby house-dog. Spurred on by this distinction, his ambition took higher flights, and in the end he had been selected to build a small engine-house at Mr. Emlott's mill. From the engine-house to the mansion was to the subject of this brief memorial a natural and easy transition. He kept to the same style—I do not know its precise name, for Mr. Ruskin has omitted it—but it pervaded his every work, from the mouse-trap to the mansion ; and when you had seen the one you knew at once the architect of the other. If the style has a specific name, I should say it was the square. It is marked by a noble simplicity, and is unrelieved, saving in the case of the bow windows, by a single projection. No attention is paid to details, and tracery is conspicuous by its absence. The whole is unadorned even to nakedness.

But let the reader's opinion be what it will, this house was to Ebenezer Emlott an important stride on the high-road to that fashionable terminus whither

in spirit he had long made his way. It was a kind of turning-corner in his career. He was a different man ever since he had entered that house. It was there that he had introduced the London lackey into his establishment; a man of sleek, smooth, noiseless habits, and miraculous in his ties and fronts. The way in which he stood before the master of the house, or any one else, in the drawing or dining room, was in itself an apology for his being —so abjectly servile was he. He was ever backing himself into the wall, and the wall seemed to give way behind him. He never came when the bell rang—he instantly began to dawn upon your vision; he never left you—he faded out of existence. Moreover, he had silky whiskers, and unimpeachable calves. At the dinner-table he was a living automaton—he performed a fixed round of duties in an exact and unvarying manner. He lived in one world, and you in another. The room might be convulsed with laughter at some sally of wit, but he was serenely unconscious. A murder might have been announced as going on in the next room, but he would have gone on removing the plates without changing a muscle. On the whole, I should say he was one of the most remarkable men of his day—in the lackey world. And Mr. Emlott had got him; for money will

do a great deal, even with a footman. For money it has been found that he will forsake his habitual haunts, and all the pleasures of a fashionable career about town, and dwell in barbarous regions for awhile —regions even as barbarous and uncivilized as Lackington. Nevertheless, Ebenezer Emlott must have paid heavily for his lackey, for he was superior to the run of his fellows; he out-Londoned London itself in his specific profession.

There was only one drawback to this investment in a footman—he was afraid of him. Never had he really enjoyed a meal since his arrival. Whatever he did he felt to be wrong in the eyes of that man. Asparagus was his favourite dish, but he had carefully eschewed it from the moment Tomkins first waited on him, from pure lack of knowledge how to consume it. And when sometimes Tomkins addressed him, by some accident, as "Will your Lordship—I beg your pardon—will you take asparagus, sir?" he trembled in his very skin, and dared scarcely raise bite or sup to his lips. How true it is that our best joys are far from being unmixed with pain!

Whenever he felt peculiarly oppressed by this servitude under Tomkins, his thoughts would revert with double force to Mrs. Bland. How quickly would she set down that fellow, for whose presence he had paid

so much, and whose presence when paid for was such a source of daily misery! How delightful to feel that he had a wife who knew as much and perhaps more than this lackered possession, with his apologetic airs and intolerable superiority! As yet, however, he was determined to keep the matter secret from Ben.

With respect to Ben, he was just as anxious as before that he should marry Maria Bland. In the management of that affair—and he fully determined to take the chief part in bringing it about, if it could be brought about—he foresaw great advantages for himself. He could break the subject himself to Mrs. Bland, and that might pave the way to a better love-making of his own. He could refer to his own loss when his nephew had set up a home for himself, and the consequent loneliness that would prevail in Lansdown Grove. He could then make an allusion to herself, and the like solitude that would reign at Westbourne Villa, should such a consummation as he desired on behalf of his nephew be realized. They would both be losers, and therefore both generous if they combined to consent to the alliance. From this point he could easily strike off upon another but contingent path. He could hint upon the wondrous blessings of congenial companionship ; he could then insinuate with a smile that they should revenge

themselves for this base desertion on the part of the young people by counter-plotting a friendship of their own. All this would be a capital beginning; and as the conversation would be carried on at the villa, far out of earshot of his footman, there was no reason why he should not preserve his presence of mind, and make a good hit at the very start.

And then—it was in the retirement of his chamber that much of this quiet planning had been carried on—Ebenezer Emlott allowed his mind to be carried on to another matter which had occupied his attention for many a past week. He had made up his mind to start a carriage, with two horses. He was somewhat alarmed as he thought of all the expense which the stabling would entail, but he would have two or none. He had already made inquiries about a man who was to live at the rear of the house, and be coachman, groom, and ostler in one; and a candidate recommended by Tomkins was to come up in a few days to inspect the place. This same gentleman had also given his master the address of a well-known City firm, who were accustomed to furnish families with the complete outfit. Carriage, harness, animals, straw, oats, and even horse-physic—everything came in the way of their business. To these people Mr. Emlott had written a letter, and received a reply suggesting

that it would be satisfactory to themselves, and probably to himself, if he would come up to town, or send an experienced agent to act for him. He was about to send a man, whose knowledge and experience he could trust, and in a few days at the latest his new purchase would be at Lansdown Grove. But there was one awkward drawback. He did not know a single carriage in the neighbourhood drawn by a pair of horses that was without a crest on its panel. Should he be content to drive about without one? That would never do. Could that man Isaac Curling help him out of his difficulty? He was said to be a sharp, shrewd man—one who was willing to make his knowledge subservient to his private interests—one who for a premium would smooth over any little difficulties in the task of discovering decayed rights and obsolete claims. Surely there were Emlotts somewhere who had a crest, or there had been Emlotts with crests. He must see this man, and see him quickly. To-morrow morning he would go out of his usual track, and on his way to the mill would call upon the genealogist. He could at least talk to the man, and see how the land lay, and whether it was possible for him, for a consideration, to help him in his new and unthought-of dilemma. With this resolve fresh upon his mind, he permitted himself to

fall asleep, and dreamt that he and Mrs. Bland, hand-in-hand, were riding in his new coach, and that his footman had a sly and waggish look in his eye as he watched them off from his master's front door. It spoiled all the enjoyment of his drive—but then it was only a dream.

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